GRASSROOTS CLIMATE JUSTICE INNOVATION THEORY

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the transformative potential of grassroots climate justice innovations to address the shortcomings of climate solutions predominantly shaped by large environmental organizations. This work seeks to inform climate policy, philanthropy, and higher education practices by challenging top-down approaches and promoting community-rooted solutions. By centering the voices and practices of grassroots movements, it examines how these local and community-based actors develop creative, place-based solutions to climate change and climate injustice. Drawing on the experience of feminist climate activists of color—identified by their communities as leaders in the climate justice movement—the dissertation highlights the nuanced interplay of environmental justice, gender equity, and Indigenous resilience in confronting systemic inequities and promoting sustainable change. Through these narratives, the research underscores the need for collective action and political resolve to address the intertwined crises of climate change and social inequality.

The dissertation investigates grassroots efforts in addressing historical and contemporary climate injustices, highlighting the innovative and collaborative approaches of community organizations and their partnerships with academic institutions. The final section of the dissertation, *Futurescapes,* offers a framework that bridges climate justice theory and practice. It integrates principles from the People's Movement Assemblies and feminist Indigenous perspectives, while exploring anti-capitalism, disability justice, and queer ecology as essential dimensions of climate justice.This dissertation reimagines philanthropy and academia's role in advancing equitable and inclusive climate solutions, offering a roadmap for systemic change grounded in justice, inclusivity, and sustainability.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

ACTIVATING CHANGE: HOW FEMINIST-LED MOVEMENTS ARE TRANSFORMING CLIMATE ACTION

Abstract

This chapter explores the emerging concept of climate justice. I conducted interviews with 12 grassroots climate activists to explore climate justice as an approach to sociopolitical change. All participants are feminist figures of color who were identified by their own communities as leaders in the climate justice movement. Personal stories illuminate important nuance, context, and complexity in the climate justice discourse and highlight the role of underrepresented actors in affecting place-based change. An emergent thematic analysis of these conversations surfaces persistent and damaging impacts of U.S. political and economic systems on marginalized communities and the shared belief that in order to be effective, climate solutions need to acknowledge the interwoven nature of environmental justice, gender equity, and Indigenous resilience. Participants argue for the pressing urgency of both collective action and political resolve to confront the complex challenges of climate change and social inequality. Their experiences on the frontline provide insight into effective actions toward just and sustainable change.

Introduction

Climate change threatens communities globally, but its impacts are disproportionately severe for low-income, Black, Indigenous, and communities of color (EPA, 2021). These populations often live in areas most affected by events like flooding, extreme weather, and poor air quality, with limited resources to evacuate or relocate in response to danger. The literature links these realities with decolonial theory and climate justice, highlighting how inadequate

infrastructure and resources leave these communities less equipped to cope with the negative effects of climate change.

To better understand the intersecting challenges of social inequality and climate change for marginalized communities, I conducted a study of national grassroots climate justice activists. Through 12 interviews with feminist climate justice leaders, I explored actions that promote or hinder the development of resilient communities capable of addressing climate impacts.

As a long-time grassroots climate justice organizer, and having worked closely with feminist and Indigenous leaders in Detroit and beyond for over a decade, my research questions are informed by the lived experiences and insights of those at the forefront of this struggle. These leaders consistently seek strategies to enhance organizational resilience and push for policy changes that reflect their needs. My position within this movement has shown me the resource gaps, particularly in how institutions like higher education and philanthropy engage with grassroots innovations.

This research responds to calls for practical solutions. By addressing these questions, we can work toward building stronger, more sustainable pathways for climate justice, grounded in the wisdom of feminist Indigenous leadership and community practices. The study reveals that while many forces undermine community resilience, the interplay of innovation, lived wisdom, and a legacy of resistance also empowers communities to thrive (White, 2018; Deloria, 1983).

Research Questions

1. What challenges do grassroots climate justice organizations, particularly in marginalized Detroit communities, face?
2. How can Indigenous knowledge and feminist perspectives inspire innovative solutions to enhance community resilience?

3. How can feminist and Indigenous frameworks shape best practices within the climate justice movement?
4. How can insights from this research inform an organizing toolkit for grassroots climate justice advocacy?
5. How can these findings shift policies in higher education, philanthropy, and climate initiatives to better support the climate justice movement's goals?

Background

How Environmental Justice Informs the Feminist Climate Justice Movement

The contemporary Just Transition movement is deeply intertwined with environmental justice, climate justice, and decolonial theory. Scholars such as McCauley and Heffron (2018) emphasize the necessity of integrating Indigenous knowledge systems into Just Transition strategies. Marginalized communities, particularly Indigenous populations, disproportionately bear the impacts of climate change and fossil fuel extraction (Hyde, 2015; Wildcat, 2009). Their inclusion is vital to ensure that Just Transition initiatives are equitable and effective. Dillon and Sze (2016) further contribute to the discourse by exploring environmental justice conflicts in U.S. cities, linking air quality concerns to broader structural inequalities and policing patterns. Their findings offer valuable insights into the challenges and potential solutions for implementing Just Transition policies in urban contexts.

Environmental hazards like pollution, toxic waste, and hazardous sites disproportionately affect marginalized groups, particularly low-income American Indian, Black, and other minority communities (Boer et al., 1997; Mohai & Bryant, 1992; Pulido, 1996; Sadd et al., 1999). This environmental injustice contributes to health and social disparities, limiting access to resources and opportunities (Bearer, 1995). Children in these communities exposed to environmental risks, such as pollution and chemicals, face higher incidences of asthma, cancer, respiratory illnesses,

and developmental delays (Carroquino, 2012), emphasizing the urgent need for effective interventions.

Environmental justice theory emerged to address these inequalities, highlighting the disproportionate environmental burdens on low-income and racially marginalized communities. Key events, such as the 1982 Warren County protests against hazardous waste siting in a predominantly Black community, catalyzed this movement (Bullard, 1990), drawing attention to systemic environmental racism (Pellow, 2000). Responses to these injustices included grassroots activism, legal challenges, and policy advocacy aimed at rectifying inequitable distribution of environmental risks (Taylor, 2014). The movement, originally known as environmental racism, also addressed the exclusion of communities of color from mainstream environmentalism (Sze, 2020). Milestones such as the 1992 establishment of the Office of Environmental Justice within the EPA and President Clinton's 1994 Executive Order 12898 to address environmental harms in low-income and minority populations marked significant progress (U.S. EPA, 1992).

Understanding environmental justice principles is crucial to fostering a fair and sustainable future. The movement emphasizes grassroots activism, collaborative decision-making, and the empowerment of marginalized communities (Mohai & Bryant, 1994). It explores the intersections of environmental issues with social, economic, and racial inequalities, emphasizing the systemic nature of these injustices.

Toxic Waste, Pollution, and Community Health

Foundational work in environmental justice, such as Bullard et al. (1987), highlighted how landfills were disproportionately sited in low-income communities of color in the U.S. South, leading to adverse health outcomes, reduced property values, and diminished green spaces. Bullard's *Dumping in Dixie* (1990) and Bullard and Wright's (1986) analysis of "sacrifice zones" underscored how politically disempowered Black communities were subjected to

pollution due to institutionalized racism. Pellow's (2000) *Environmental Inequality in Los Angeles* further demonstrated how industrial pollution disproportionately impacted minority neighborhoods, reinforcing racial and class inequalities. In *The Wrong Complexion for Protection* (2012), Bullard and Wright showed how African American communities remain more vulnerable during environmental disasters, highlighting the ongoing nature of environmental racism. Taylor's (2014) *Toxic Communities* provided a national perspective, examining how hazardous waste sites and industrial pollution worsen public health crises in low-income communities of color. Barron (2017), focusing on PCB pollution in Anniston, Alabama, revealed the long-term health consequences of systemic neglect. Collectively, these works underscore the persistent intersection of race, class, and environmental degradation in the U.S.

Positionality and Environmental Justice Movements

Positionality—how individuals' perspectives are shaped by race, class, gender, and lived experiences—is critical in environmental justice research, influencing participation in and acknowledgment of environmental issues (Pulido & Peña, 1998; Pastor et al., 2006). For instance, Schlosberg (1999) in Environmental Justice and the New Pluralism argues that environmental activism must address the diverse lived experiences of marginalized groups, emphasizing that recognizing multiple identities within these movements is crucial for inclusive solutions.

Similarly, Taylor (2000), in Invisible No More: African American Women and the Emergence of Toxic Waste Management, highlights how African American women's intersectional marginalization positioned them to lead the environmental justice movement. Taylor's work underscores the importance of centering marginalized voices. Bullard's The Quest for Environmental Justice (2005) further explores how race, class, and environmental degradation intersect, showing that positionality influences both vulnerability to environmental

harms and engagement in activism. These works collectively illustrate that positionality profoundly affects how communities experience and resist environmental injustices, which is essential for developing inclusive strategies.

Race, Space, and Environmental Inequality

Scholars have shown how historical exclusion and racial segregation shape marginalized communities' experiences with environmental spaces. Finney (2014) notes the underrepresentation of African Americans in national parks, tracing it to segregation and exclusion that have long denied access to green spaces. This theme is echoed in Racial Ecologies (Nishime & Hester Williams, 2018), which examines the spatial dimensions of environmental inequality across geographies.

Vasudevan and Smith (2020) further demonstrate how racialized communities in Badin, North Carolina, and Flint, Michigan, are treated as internal colonies, aligning with Lerner's Fenceline (2006), which explores how Black neighborhoods in petrochemical towns like Norco, Louisiana, face disproportionate environmental hazards compared to white communities. These studies show that environmental injustice is deeply tied to racialized, segregated spaces, exacerbating health disparities and economic disadvantages.

A People's Curriculum for the Earth (Bigelow & Swinehart, 2014) extends these themes to education, advocating for an intersectional environmental curriculum that addresses race and space within broader social justice contexts. Collectively, these works call for policies that recognize the historical exclusion of marginalized communities from environmental spaces and advocate for an approach to environmental justice that addresses the entanglement of race, place, and inequality.

Feminist Climate Theory

Feminist climate theory emerged in response to traditional environmentalism's failure to address how environmental issues disproportionately affect women and marginalized communities (Turquet et al., 2023). This framework advocates for an intersectional approach to environmental justice, recognizing the interconnectedness of gender, race, class, and socio-economic status (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008).

While traditional environmentalism plays a key role in raising awareness, it often overlooks the specific challenges faced by marginalized groups. Feminist climate theory seeks to fill these gaps by incorporating the perspectives of Indigenous feminist leaders and others most affected by environmental injustices, contributing to a more comprehensive climate justice framework. Scholars in this field emphasize how gender intersects with other forms of oppression, highlighting the increased vulnerabilities marginalized communities face due to socio-political and economic factors (MacGregor, 2009).

Women, particularly from the Global South and Indigenous communities, are often at the forefront of environmental justice movements, using their lived experiences to challenge unjust policies and advocate for transformative change. A key tenet of feminist climate theory is recognizing the "invisible" labor performed by women, such as caregiving and community organizing—tasks that are crucial but often undervalued. Whyte (2014) calls for a transformative economic approach that assigns value to this labor, envisioning a society that prioritizes well-being over profit.

Agarwal's work on "Gender and Green Governance" explores women's roles in forest management, revealing both their contributions and challenges in male-dominated fields. Buckingham and Kulcur (2009), in *Gendered Geographies of Environmental Injustice*, examine how intersecting oppressions make urban women particularly vulnerable to environmental risks.

Harcourt and Nelson's collection *Practising Feminist Political Ecology* offers global perspectives on the intersectionality within environmental justice movements.

By centering intersectionality and unveiling the value of invisible labor, feminist climate theory provides a vital framework for building more equitable societal structures. Its continued integration into academic and policy discussions is essential for advancing climate justice.

Decolonial and Indigenous Theory

Decolonial theory critiques global colonial structures and their impact on knowledge production, while Indigenous theory focuses on the experiences, wisdom, and worldviews of Indigenous peoples, rooted in their unique histories and relationships with land. Both frameworks highlight the environmental impacts of colonialism on Indigenous communities, where resource extraction and environmental degradation have disproportionately harmed these groups (Wildcat, 2006). The climate justice movement seeks to address this legacy by centering Indigenous voices and their deep connections to the land (Smith, 1999).

Decolonization goes beyond inclusion of Indigenous rituals, demanding a fundamental shift that honors Indigenous political philosophies and knowledge systems, which can authentically transform cultural perceptions and power dynamics (Regan, 2010). Decolonial and Indigenous theories resist colonial dominance, advocating for the recognition and validation of non-Western knowledge systems. Scholars like Coulthard (2014) and Simpson (2017) critique governance models and explore Indigenous traditions as tools for resistance and decolonization. While tensions exist between rejecting colonial frameworks and seeking integration, the goal is to re-center Indigenous knowledge within environmental discourse to create more inclusive, sustainable solutions.

Works by Yusoff (2018), Estes (2019), Whyte (2018), and Kimmerer (2013) emphasize challenging mainstream narratives, integrating Indigenous perspectives, and chronicling

Indigenous resistance. These scholars envision a future where Indigenous knowledge informs environmental policies, challenging colonial mindsets and fostering reciprocity with nature.

Just Transition

To bridge the gap between climate justice and systemic solutions, many scholars and practitioners focus on emission reduction as a key strategy. While crucial, reducing emissions alone does not address the deeper social and economic inequalities driving environmental injustice. Grassroots and frontline communities, disproportionately affected, are essential in shaping comprehensive solutions. The Just Transition framework expands beyond emissions reduction, calling for a complete overhaul of energy systems to create sustainable, long-term prosperity for all (Wilson, 2001). This requires incorporating diverse viewpoints and acknowledging the interconnectedness of environmental justice, gender equity, and Indigenous community resilience.

Initially rooted in labor movements, Just Transition has evolved into a broader vision advocating for a sustainable economy that ensures equitable, ecologically sound livelihoods for entire communities. The framework centers on democratic governance, ecological resilience, and leadership from marginalized communities, challenging systemic oppression (Frierson, 2022). Key principles guide Just Transition efforts (Just Transition Alliance):

- Buen Vivir: Prioritizes collective rights and just relationships with the natural world.
- Meaningful Work: Emphasizes leadership through transformative work, uplifting individuals and communities.
- Self-Determination: Highlights community involvement in decision-making to shape local economies and assert rights.
- Equitable Redistribution of Resources and Power: Calls for addressing historical social inequities across race, class, and gender.

- Regenerative Ecological Economics: Focuses on ecological resilience, reduced resource consumption, and biodiversity restoration.
- Culture and Tradition: Recognizes the role of diverse traditions and advocates for reparations for lands impacted by systemic violence.
- Solidarity: Emphasizes collective action against imperialism and militarism, recognizing the global interconnectedness of these struggles.
- Building What We Need Now: Urges the development of local solutions to replace extractive practices and empower communities.

The emergence of Blue-Green Coalitions—alliances between labor and environmental activists in the 20th century—laid the groundwork for modern Just Transition discourse, demonstrating integrated approaches to labor rights and environmental justice (Gould et al., 2004). Newell and Mulvaney (2013) provide a comprehensive overview of Just Transition, tracing its development from a focus on workers' rights to addressing socio-economic and environmental justice.

McCauley and Heffron critically examine the framework, discussing its strengths, weaknesses, and gaps. Their analysis underscores the need for a robust theoretical foundation to support the practical application of Just Transition principles. By centering marginalized voices and integrating diverse knowledge systems, the Just Transition framework presents a holistic approach to addressing both climate change and social inequities.

Methodology

Study Design

At the core of the Just Transition transformation is a commitment to amplify the voices of community leaders and highlight grassroots innovations that contribute to climate justice solutions. This research mirrors this commitment by by integrating humanizing and Indigenous research methodologies and placing participants' voices at the forefront of the study (Smith,

2012). Humanizing research methodology investigates the historical and ongoing systems of inequity that marginalize communities, recognizing the importance of respectful, equitable, and collaborative engagement (Paris & Winn, 2014). These methodologies prioritize critical considerations such as positionality, reflexivity, and relationship dynamics, which collectively create a foundation of genuine respect for participants' perspectives and experiences (Wilson, 2021). In this context, positionality refers to the researcher's social identity and the influence it has on their perspective and interactions in the research context;reflexivity involves the ongoing self-examination of biases and assumptions throughout the research process;and relationship dynamics refer to the interactions and power dynamics between researchers and participants.

This study has integrated these principles by prioritizing community, inclusivity, empathetic leadership, and transparent communication. I structured the interview process around the Anishinaabe concept of Keeoukaywin, derived from traditional practices of communal connection and knowledge sharing, and rooted in the act of 'visiting.'. Keeoukaywin foster storytelling and relationality, particularly within Indigenous communities, by building mutual respect and relational accountability, and it prioritizes setting the research in a place that is comfortable for the participant(Gaudet, 2019). Central to Keeoukaywin is the creation of spaces where trust, respect, and connection can grow.

At the beginning of each interview I offered tobacco, an act of gratitude and recognition of the knowledge being shared. Tobacco is considered a sacred medicine in many Indigenous cultures. By offering tobacco I honor the stories and build trust and rapport with the participants.This practice reflects a commitment to cultural sensitivity and aligns with the humanizing principles of Keeoukaywin, where every voice is a vital thread in the web of community connection.

My own voice is also part of this story, and the use of first person t is purposeful. I am an Indigenous feminist activist and the former director of a local grassroots environmental organization. I am also a researcher. These roles are intertwined in the design and implementation of this research, as are my relationships with the participants, many of whom I have worked with in Detroit This position as an insider provides me important insight into the complexities and obstacles experienced by the community. They trust me to tell their stories. My position also demands consistent and ongoing reflexivity to prevent bias and ensure the primacy of the participants' voice. I have done this work by memoing consistently throughout the research process, meeting regularly with colleagues who are not connected to the work for outside perspectives on the data and findings, and brought my findings back to the community for review.

Study Population and Recruitment

This study focuses on the personal stories and experiences of feminist activists of color who are identified by their own communities as leaders in the climate justice movement. The goal is to capture nuance, context, and complexity that may be overlooked in studies with larger samples and to highlight underrepresented voices within the climate justice discourse. All interviews were conducted during public meetings where participants represented their organizations, not their personal beliefs.

To identify climate justice advocacy leaders, I distributed a survey to all 70 organizations affiliated with the network coalition Grassroots Global Justice, "an alliance of U.S.-based grassroots organizing (GRO) groups comprised of working and poor people and communities of color…working for climate justice, gender justice, an end to war, and a just transition to a Feminist economy" (GGJ "About Us"). This approach aimed to harness the collective intelligence of these organizations to identify individuals perceived as effective leaders in their

communities. A list of names was compiled from these responses, including only those mentioned in 83% of the surveys. This process ensured that the leaders selected for interviews had broad support and influence within the community.

From this consolidated list of 20, 12 individuals were invited to participate in interviews based on their availability during the study timeframe, location, expertise, and leadership position within their organization and climate justice networks. The selection emphasized a consensus across multiple Grassroots Global Justice-affiliated organizations, ensuring that the participants were recognized as feminist leaders of color in climate justice.

Participants were contacted by phone, and interviews were scheduled in person or by phone, depending on their preference and availability. This method allowed for a flexible and participant-centered approach, ensuring the comfort and convenience of the interviewees.

Data Collection

The data collection process involved in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted exclusively during public membership or annual meetings to explore grassroots feminist leaders' perceptions of grassroots solutions to climate change and Just Transition principles. The principles of humanizing research methodology and Indigenous research frameworks informed the interview guide (Appendix B). Part 1 of the interview covered participants' backgrounds, journeys into climate justice work, and roles within their organizations and communities. Part 2 focused on grassroots solutions to climate change, experiences with implementing Just Transition principles, and challenges faced in their advocacy work. The interviews were conducted as part of public meetings during panel or fishbowl sessions, ensuring that participants shared their perspectives as representatives of their organizations. Each interview was transcribed verbatim.

Participant interview data were collected during Climate Justice Alliance (CJA) and Grassroots Global Justice (GGJ) membership and annual meetings, where participants were explicitly representing their climate justice organizations. To build rapport, interviews were designed to occur over two sessions. However, six participants requested to complete the entire interview in one session for convenience.

Given the sensitivity of discussing personal and community experiences with climate justice, efforts were made to ensure that the interview questions minimized personal information. Participants were informed that they could pause or stop the interview if they felt uncomfortable at any point. All participants completed their interviews. Each interview was audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed. This study was classified as exempt by the IRB as documented in STUDY00010513 as interviews were conducted at public meetings and participants were official representatives their respective organizations.

Analysis

To ground the findings in the data, I utilized ResearchTalk's Sort and Sift, Think and Shift method (Maietta, 2021), a multidimensional qualitative analysis approach informed by phenomenology, grounded theory, narrative research, and case study (Maietta et al., 2021). This approach includes various methods such as writing memos, monitoring topics in the data, inventorying quotations, and diagramming quotations and topics. It is an iterative process of immersing in the data, reflecting on the insights gained, and deciding on the next steps in the analysis. The emphasis is on comparing the experiences of different participants and analyzing each participant's lived experience about the research topic, allowing for the monitoring of topics vertically by participant and horizontally across participants.

The analysis began with a deductive coding process, utilizing a pre-determined codebook to ensure a focused and systematic examination of the core concepts central to the study:

grassroots activism, climate change, and Just Transition. The transcriptions for each interview were systematically organized into a grid structure aligned with specific interview questions (Saldaña, 2015). Within this grid, keywords, phrases, and recurring themes related to the main concepts were systematically identified in each interview response.

A comparative analysis was then conducted to discern similarities and differences across all responses (Miles et al., 2014). The primary goal was to comprehend how participants conceptualized grassroots, climate change, and Just Transition, paying careful attention to variations in interpretation. The coding process involved assigning labels or codes to each identified theme or concept (Creswell, 2017) under each interview question, ensuring consistency throughout the analysis. Implementing these methodologies required deliberate attention to potential power imbalances, cultural protocols, language barriers, and logistical complexities.

Prior to reviewing the data, I composed a memo reflecting on the interviews and initial lessons learned. Each transcript was reviewed to identify pulse quotations—key experiences and reflections—and a memo was written regarding each pulse quotation. Subsequently, a memo was composed for each transcript addressing two questions: (a) What is there to learn from this data collection episode and (b) Why is this anecdote important to this study? The first question captured the main topics discussed and exemplary quotations, while the second question described the importance of these topics and how they addressed the study aims.

Statements from the memos were then grouped into key topics. A unifying theme was developed from these grouped key topics and associated quotations. Using matrices, I explored the grouped key topics to compare perceptions and experiences of grassroots activism, climate change mitigation, and Just Transition strategies. This process allowed for systematically

comparing codes across various interview responses, identifying patterns and variations in participants' perceptions.

To bolster the validity of the findings, rigorous measures were employed. Member checking involved inviting participants to review and confirm the accuracy of the interpretations, ensuring alignment with their lived experiences. Peer debriefing, which included discussions with colleagues or experts in the field, provided external perspectives, mitigating potential bias and enhancing the robustness of the interpretations. These practices emerged from the established methodological approach of Sort & Sift and grounded theory.

Results and Discussion

Several key themes emerged from the interviews: (1) community engagement, (2) gender empowerment, (3) intersectionality and inclusivity, (4) sustainability and regenerative practices, (5) grassroots definitions of a Just Transition, and (6) challenging power structures and systems. These themes, along with related sub-themes, revealed participants' specific ideas for addressing climate injustice. Open-ended questions encouraged participants to share detailed narratives about their experiences, strategies, and solutions, allowing for deeper insights into their work, challenges, and successes.

Community Engagement

The conversation around community engagement in the context of Just Transition is rich with insights about the critical role that communities play in shaping their futures. It’s not just about transitioning away from harmful practices but ensuring that those most impacted are leading the charge, equipped with the resources and power to drive the change they need.

Doceta Thomas opened by emphasizing the importance of an inclusive framework: “I think the work that’s needed for Just Transition is to include a framework that reaches across cultures, genders, generations, and economic statuses, intersecting with education, advocacy, and

policy change to represent all people. We need to work intentionally with like-minded organizations to advance a Just Transition that's not extractive but regenerative." She stressed that the transition must prioritize equity, environmental justice, and energy democracy while recognizing the need for resilience-building, economic growth, and workforce development.

The conversation then turned to Ife Kilimanjaro, who highlighted the importance of listening to communities in the transition process: "From a national perspective, I've been hearing a couple of different things. What I see in my work nationally—not just locally in Detroit—is the importance of listening sessions. We've heard from communities where Just Transition has worked and where it hasn't. One critical piece is community engagement in what they actually want and need, and also tapping into the expertise of local people. But there has to be engagement—both in identifying the problem and in determining if folks even want to transition. If they do, then what is it transitioning to?"

Doceta reflecting on the need for this community involvement to be fully resourced. "There has to be a coordinated effort to make the transition that people want. It's not just about the people's engagement but also broader civic engagement—connecting with schools, hospitals, government agencies, and elected officials. There's a need for planning that's informed by the community, but that also has institutional backing and funding. Without that, it's difficult to get anywhere."

Ife agreed, adding, "It's important to also have a sober assessment as part of the engagement. We need to ask: What do we really want? Are we happy with what we'll gain? Are we prepared to release our attachments to certain things? If we want a Just Transition where people have jobs and access to clean energy, we need to create cooperative structures that support families and embody democratic principles."

The conversation circled back to the importance of empowering communities to drive the transition. As Doceta had remarked earlier, it's about ensuring that communities are not just involved in the decision-making process but are leading it. This means recognizing the diverse contributions of grassroots leaders, especially those from historically marginalized groups, and ensuring they have the resources to shape their futures. Only then can we move toward a Just Transition that is truly equitable and sustainable.

Gender Empowerment

The discussion on gender empowerment in climate justice was marked by passionate reflections on the role of women and queer leadership in driving transformative movements. It was clear that for these activists, gender is not just a side issue but a central force in how Just Transition and climate justice are envisioned and enacted.

Kimmy Wasserman, from LVEJO, opened the conversation with a powerful statement: "Women are the lifeblood of all social movements, and Just Transition should ensure the economy is regenerative versus extractive. Women have driven revolution and transformation, playing a central role in Just Transition." This immediately resonated with the other women, as they began sharing their own experiences of leadership and the often unseen labor they contribute to these movements.

Cindy Weissner took the conversation deeper, reflecting on the broader need for a feminist economy. "We need to place value on those who have not only been undervalued but also exploited," she said, underscoring how critical it is to acknowledge the work that women—especially women of color—do in building systemic alternatives. "It's no accident that so much of the leadership within this movement has been from women. We hold the contradictions of the movement and lead the transformative work." Cindy pointed out how much

reproductive labor goes into shaping visions for Just Transition, yet this work often remains invisible.

As Cindy finished speaking, Julianna jumped in to echo her thoughts. “When I’m in meetings, all I see are women—especially in justice spaces. I see more men in labor spaces, but in climate and justice spaces, it feels like it’s just women making things happen. Women have been the drivers of revolution and transformation for time immemorial, even if we haven’t always been on the frontlines with guns. We’re the ones doing the work, getting things done.”

Giizigaad, visibly frustrated, added her own experience to the mix. “Oh my god, there’s always been this strange dynamic where some of my friends in the movement, mostly men, are the ‘Big Idea’ guys. They come into the room, drop their big idea, and leave. Meanwhile, we women are stuck doing all the work! We have big ideas too—and we're the ones facing the oppression, so we know the issues better than anyone.”

Cindy nodded, picking up on Giizigaad’s point about gender dynamics in leadership. “There needs to be a massive culture shift, particularly among men, to truly value participatory democracy and self-determination. As part of Grassroots Global Justice, I’m really excited to provide the feminist framework needed to do this work.” She went on to discuss how, in the current “Me Too” moment, there’s an opportunity to fundamentally rethink and fight against the commodification of both bodies and the planet. “One component of the feminist economy is to take our bodies off the market—to exist in a just relationship with nature. Reproductive labor—child care, elder care, education—these are social needs, not just family ones.”

As the conversation wound down, Cindy brought it back to the larger contradictions the movement faces. “We, in frontline communities, navigate many contradictions. Climate change has become a big business opportunity, and we have to be careful of false solutions that worsen our ecological and economic crises.” Her words left the group in a reflective silence, united in

their shared experiences and the urgent need to continue pushing for true gender empowerment within climate justice.

Intersectionality and Inclusivity

The discussion around Just Transition naturally brings forward themes of intersectionality, inclusivity, and the essential leadership of marginalized communities. Each activist shared insights on how these values must shape the transition from extractive economies to regenerative ones, stressing that this movement is about building solidarity across local and global scales.

Cindy Weisner from Grassroots Global Justice highlighted the resourcefulness of women in these spaces, emphasizing how much is accomplished with limited resources by connecting various struggles. She underscored the importance of seeing the intersections between social, economic, and environmental fights within the Just Transition framework. For Cindy, this work is about more than just addressing climate change—it's about recognizing and building connections across issues, ensuring no one is left behind.

Ife Kilimanjaro expanded on this idea, stressing the need for the most impacted communities to lead the way. She emphasized that a Just Transition must embody solidarity at local, national, and global levels and, more importantly, must be liberatory and transformative. For her, the extractive economy's impact crosses borders, making it crucial to think globally but act locally, starting with those who have been historically marginalized. "We must build the world we need now," she argued, underscoring the urgency of the work and the need to displace extractive practices with regenerative solutions.

Culture also plays a critical role in this framework. Dorceyta Taylor reflected on how the transition from fossil fuels to clean energy disproportionately impacts communities of color and low-income communities, the very people who work in polluting facilities and endure the worst

health and economic consequences. For her, it is vital that these communities—particularly Indigenous ones—have a seat at the table. Dorceyta pointed to the Pine Ridge Training Center in South Dakota as a model of what a Just Transition could look like when led by those directly affected.

The role of women in driving this transformation was another recurring theme. Women have long been at the forefront of social movements, often unnoticed but essential to their success. Cindy pointed out that much of the leadership within the Just Transition movement comes from women, particularly women of color, who have been thinking critically about systemic alternatives. She emphasized that their labor, especially the reproductive labor that sustains communities and movements, is often undervalued and goes unseen, yet it is crucial to building and shaping the future.

This theme of women as drivers of transformation aligns closely with the fight to challenge deep-rooted inequities. The women noted that confronting environmental injustice also means tackling race, gender, and class-based inequities. Women, especially in low-income communities, bear the brunt of climate disasters but are often the ones spearheading solutions for community resilience. Their work and leadership are vital to creating a Just Transition, and the movement must uplift their voices and efforts.

The conversation naturally circled back to the need for a feminist economy—one that prioritizes the "maintaining of life, maintaining of people, and maintaining of the planet," as Cindy put it. She called for a revaluation of those historically exploited, particularly women and marginalized communities. This feminist approach to the economy is not just about addressing environmental issues but about rethinking economic systems to place value on life and care.

Together, these voices reinforce the idea that the path to a Just Transition is one of inclusivity, intersectionality, and a deep commitment to addressing the interconnected

oppressions that shape our world. True transformation can only happen when marginalized communities are empowered to lead, and when the work of women, especially those on the frontlines, is recognized as central to building a just and sustainable future.

Sustainability and Regenerative Practices

At the heart of a Just Transition is sustainability and regenerative practices are not just ideals but imperatives for survival. The voices of these feminist climate leaders intertwined as we discussed the need to move away from harmful practices like fossil fuel extraction and toward systems that prioritize care for the planet and future generations. One participant from the Climate Justice Alliance remarked, “There has been a transition in climate to recognize the economic, social, political, racial, and gender-justice central to the crisis.” This statement set the tone for the broader conversation, highlighting how interconnected these struggles are and how central justice is to any meaningful climate action.

For many of the women, regenerative practices meant centering a feminist economy within the context of a Just Transition. They spoke about how traditional economic systems exploit women’s labor, particularly that of women of color, and how transformative change requires a shift that values care work and equity. Their words collectively underscored a truth: building a more just society means reimagining economic structures that do not prioritize profit over people. A feminist economy, they agreed, seeks to foster inclusive, caring relationships between people and the planet, offering a path forward that aligns deeply with sustainability and social justice.

As one woman reflected, "A visionary economy has to prioritize community power and local control." In this reimagined economy, shifting away from fossil fuels and harmful extractive practices is not just about energy; it's about uplifting communities and giving them control over their resources and decisions. This shift, she argued, requires embracing energy

democracy, public transit, and ecosystem restoration, all driven by a deep democracy where workers and communities make the decisions. This vision of local power and deep democracy represents the broader goal of a Just Transition: a world where economic and political systems serve people, not the other way around.

As their discussion deepened, the women acknowledged that these transformations must go beyond environmental solutions—they must address the systems of oppression that perpetuate injustice. Patriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism, they agreed, are at the core of the environmental and social crises we face. Education, they said, is one of the most powerful tools to challenge these systems. “Education,” one participant added, “is where we raise awareness, analyze root causes, and build the collective power needed for systemic change.”

The complexity of creating a Just Transition became clearer with each woman’s contribution. It’s not simply about moving from unsustainable practices to greener alternatives; it’s about transforming the systems of power that marginalize communities and exploit the planet. Together, they reflected on the urgency of building collective consciousness, ensuring access to resources, and engaging with the state to create meaningful, systemic change.

In their vision, the transition to sustainability isn’t just about the environment—it’s about justice. It's about uplifting marginalized voices, valuing care work, and fostering deep democracy where workers and communities shape their own futures. Through this conversation, a shared vision emerged: a future where the well-being of people and the planet takes precedence over profit, and where education, equity, and community power are the foundation for a Just Transition that can truly serve future generations.

Defining the Grassroots Just Transition Theory

The women gathered, their voices flowing in and out of the conversation, weaving together a complex vision of what a Just Transition must look like in practice. "A Just Transition

embodies solidarity, liberatory and transformative solutions," one woman began, echoing a sentiment many of them shared. The room felt charged as they explored the interconnectedness of communities, struggles, and the imperative to confront imperialism and militarism. "It builds what we need now," another woman added, grounding the conversation in the present urgency of their work.

The group agreed that such a transition starts on the local, small scale, where communities have the power to displace extractive practices and plant the seeds of the future they all envisioned. But they didn't stop there. The discussion turned toward those who have been systematically left behind. "A Just Transition must consider those who've been overlooked," one participant pointed out. This meant not only looking back at who had been excluded but also looking forward, toward the direction the movement must take to be truly inclusive.

A feminist framework was also essential to their shared vision. The women emphasized that it's impossible to talk about transformation without addressing the gendered nature of oppression and labor. "We're not just talking about economic systems or environmental degradation. We're talking about the way these systems exploit women, the way they treat care work like it's invisible," one of them said, her voice firm. The feminist lens, they agreed, must be central to achieving a Just Transition that doesn't replicate old patterns of exclusion and harm.

Cindy Weisner leaned in, bringing focus to the core of their organizing: "It doesn't work without place. It's a nice radical idea, but no—it has to be place-based and led by impacted people." The group nodded, resonating with the truth of her words. Their strength, they all knew, lay in understanding the communities they were working with and organizing for. Place was everything. If the transition wasn't grounded in the specific needs, histories, and visions of the people in a given community, how could it be just?

Ife Kilimanjaro picked up the thread, adding depth to the conversation: "Place means everything in a Just Transition. It’s incredibly important to understand the context and commitment of a particular place." She went on, painting a picture of how deeply embedded the economy is in the identity of a town or a region. Was it a university town? A place driven by an industry on the rise or in decline? These questions, she emphasized, were not abstract—they were at the core of how a Just Transition would work in practice.

The conversation moved fluidly between the theoretical and the practical, always circling back to the idea that a Just Transition couldn’t be imposed from the outside. One participant reminded the group of the listening sessions they had done as part of the Just Transition working group. "We first had to ask people on the ground, how are they relating to a Just Transition? How is it working, or not working for them?" she said. This process of listening revealed something crucial: while there can be broad definitions of a Just Transition, the specifics always depend on the particularities of place. "Even though the economies are connected, people are born, live, and die in particular places. It's there that a Just Transition gets defined," she emphasized.

As the conversation deepened, the women reflected on the internal transformation that they themselves were undergoing through this work. "It’s not just the thing we are fighting for," Weisner continued, "but also the transformation that WE go through. We have to meet people where they are, both mentally and physically." The idea resonated deeply with the others, as they spoke of the need to embody the shift they sought in the world. It wasn't just about shifting policies or economies—it was about shifting mindsets, about transforming how communities saw themselves and their power.

The conversation wound its way back to the role of education and imagination. "What are people being prepared for? What are they able to imagine?" Kilimanjaro asked, her words hanging in the air. They talked about how education systems too often function as factories,

preparing people for labor that sustains extractive economies rather than fostering the creative, visionary thinking necessary for a Just Transition. "If the factory crumbles, the town crumbles," one participant remarked somberly.

But there was hope in their words, too. By grounding their work in place, in the lives and dreams of the people most impacted, and by embodying the changes they sought, these women were forging the path to a Just Transition. It wasn't just about the policies or practices—it was about building the world they needed now, from the ground up, together.

Challenging Power Structures

The conversation around power structures in the Just Transition movement flows like a dialogue among women who have long been at the forefront of revolution and transformation. These voices, intertwined, reflect the complex struggle of moving toward a more equitable and just future, where leadership, labor, and power are radically reimagined.

One woman begins, her voice grounded in history, "Women have always been at the forefront of revolution and transformation, even if we haven't always been on the frontlines with guns. We're the ones making things happen, even when men hold the leadership titles," a participant from Grassroots Global Justice shares, invoking the resilience and leadership of women of color. Her words echo across generations, reminding the others of the often-invisible labor behind the fight for justice.

The conversation pivots to a broader vision. Ife Kilimanjaro adds, "We need a system-wide shift, from a socio-political and economic system that draws its life from dirty energy—nuclear, burning, bio—to one that has not yet been fully defined." She pauses, then emphasizes, "But this happens in just ways. People who are often left behind, those forgotten in economic prophecies, must be the ones involved in shaping the institutions and relationships that

value their lives. They must play a role in deciding the laws and policies that guide this transition."

Nods of agreement move through the group as Cindy Weisner, speaking with the authority of lived experience, adds, "We must build a visionary economy, one that's different from what we have now. This means stopping the bad while building the new." She looks around the room, "Just Transition is about redistributing resources and power to local communities. It's about moving from dirty energy to energy democracy, from highways to public transit, from landfills to zero waste. It's about moving from military violence to peaceful resolution. At its core, Just Transition is about deep democracy—where workers and communities control the decisions that impact their daily lives."

Ahmina Maxey, from the Michigan Environmental Justice Coalition, steps in, reflecting on the tensions she sees. "What we are up against, in a practical sense, is the false and destructive dichotomy within the movement. The organizing arm and the policy arm really seem to be on different pages. I feel like, on the organizing end, I don't know what we are really organizing for. Direct resistance is important, yes, but how does that translate into policy change or disinvestment? If nothing changes in the institutions, we're stuck." She takes a deep breath and continues, "What I see, what I want to build, is a community free from pollution, from police violence. It's great to have big visions, but we need clean air, soil, and water for our people now. I don't want our communities living in fear. I want a Just Community. Intersectionality is our home. I want to know that our children are safe."

"What we're up against is this false dichotomy." Cecelia elaborates, "Organizing and policy are disconnected. If we can't translate resistance into institutional change, nothing changes. We need clean air, water, and soil now. We need to stop killing our people. Justice is not inevitable. It requires intentional action."

Jumana Vasi joins in, her voice pragmatic yet hopeful, “There are three key elements to consider if we’re going to realize this new world. First, we need a collective consciousness—a political theory people can believe in. Second, we need resources—money, technology, models, and lessons learned. And third, we must engage with the state. We can’t live in a bubble and ignore the infrastructure that exists. We need to engage with it strategically.”

As the conversation deepens, Cecelia adds another layer, “Just Transition initiatives are about more than shifting from dirty energy to energy democracy. They’re about moving from funding highways to expanding public transit, from incinerators and landfills to zero waste, from industrial food systems to food sovereignty, from gentrification to community land rights, from military violence to peaceful resolution, and from rampant destructive development to ecosystem restoration. At the core of all of this is deep democracy—where workers and communities control their destinies.”

Shalini Gupta chimes in, weaving in a broader perspective, “A lot of what led us to think about Just Transition was the need for a systemic understanding of what we’re up against—white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism. Just Transition is in defense of the Commons and the sacredness of the land. It’s about building a sharing and caring economy, about free transportation, and zero waste.”

The group acknowledges that the work ahead requires more than just visions—it requires a transformation of not only systems but also selves. “Embodying the shift,” they seem to agree, means aligning individuals and communities with the principles of Just Transition. It means challenging the oppressive systems that have shaped their worlds while recognizing the interconnectedness of social, economic, and environmental justice.

Conclusion

Through this rich exchange, these women paint a vivid picture of a movement that is grappling with the tensions of fighting for systemic change. Their leadership and reflections make clear that the pathway to a Just Transition lies in addressing immediate community needs and fundamentally reshaping how society values gendered labor, power, and justice.

Transitioning to a clean energy economy promises sustainable prosperity for a broader segment of society by reducing the concentrated economic power of fossil fuel suppliers and investing in local communities (Wilson, 2001). However, this shift requires significant social and economic changes, presenting challenges for marginalized communities and those dependent on the fossil fuel industry.

While reducing carbon footprints and stimulating economic growth are key goals of the clean energy transition, equally important is addressing the well-being of historically marginalized communities affected by environmental injustices. By prioritizing social and economic justice, we can ensure a more equitable future as we move toward sustainability.

Place-based approaches are crucial to implementing Just Transition, as they emphasize solutions tailored to local contexts. Ife Kilimanjaro highlights the importance of considering a place's unique economy, history, and community engagement in achieving equitable outcomes. Gender dynamics intersect with the Just Transition movement, revealing structural disadvantages faced by women, whose work is often undervalued in a capitalist system. Addressing this imbalance is vital for building sustainable and equitable economies.

As the climate justice movement evolves, refining research methodologies and centering marginalized voices will be essential in shaping a more inclusive and impactful movement for sustainable change.

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CHAPTER 2

DETROIT'S CLIMATE JUSTICE JOURNEY: COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT IN THE FACE OF INJUSTICE

Abstract

This chapter explores the landscape of climate justice practices unfolding in Detroit, Michigan, shedding light on grassroots efforts actively addressing climate injustices while acknowledging the historical context often overlooked by more top-down initiatives. Grounded in the frameworks of environmental justice put forth by Pulido (2016) and Ranganathan and Bratman (2021), this study centers on Detroit's unique blend of climate and economic challenges. It evaluates the efficacy of community collaborations with academic institutions through a multifaceted approach, including interviews, reflections on climate justice events, archival research, and observational studies. It conducts comparative analyses between these community-academic collaborations and other grassroots efforts in the local context.

Through these comparative studies, the chapter not only sheds light on the varied challenges faced by marginalized groups but also highlights the innovative and creative responses emerging from within these communities. It underscores the significance of place-based, community-rooted problem-solving endeavors, showcasing the resilience and agency present in Detroit and potentially in other communities with similar social dynamics. By delving into the barriers and facilitators of impactful change within Detroit's climate justice movement, this study offers valuable insights that can inform the development of community-centered strategies and enrich the discourse on approaches to achieving a more just and sustainable future for Detroit and beyond.

Introduction

As a Detroit community organizer for 20 years and an academic liaison, I've witnessed numerous partnerships between communities and academic institutions. Despite growing interest in "following the community's lead," significant funding and resources still favor a top-down approach. This chapter argues that prioritizing community-defined goals fosters more sustainable and impactful partnerships. To explore this, I present two contrasting approaches to sustainability efforts in Detroit: a "grasstop" academic-community partnership and grassroots community initiatives. Through case studies and interviews, these examples clarify the distinct advantages and challenges of both strategies in achieving lasting change.

Grassroots strategies involve community members directly organizing to address local needs and shape their own agendas, fostering inclusive participation and empowerment (UNHCR, 2024). Grasstops, in contrast, often comprise established organizations, government bodies, or corporations implementing policies with limited community engagement. As Stoecker (2009) discusses, a truly community-driven model centers the voices of local stakeholders, emphasizing empowerment through direct involvement in shaping initiatives. This aligns with Kretzmann and McKnight's (1993) approach to asset-based community development, which supports grassroots principles by encouraging communities to mobilize their own resources and define their own goals.

Top-down strategies closely align with grasstop models, favoring institutional influence over community-led efforts. Although both approaches have unique strengths, grasstop initiatives often overshadow grassroots work due to their greater access to resources and public influence. This disparity highlights the challenges of inclusive problem-solving within climate and environmental justice movements. The work of Agyeman, Bullard, and Evans (2003) on "just sustainabilities" underscores how sustainability efforts must prioritize social equity to be

truly effective, especially in marginalized communities.

Detroit's history of Indigenous and Black activism emphasizes the importance of grassroots efforts, as the city continues to confront place-based injustices and gentrification that echo colonial patterns, including resource deprivation, displacement, and renaming of culturally significant areas (Ladd, 2015). Whyte's (2018) work on Indigenous environmental justice highlights the resilience of communities that maintain kinship with the land in the face of such historical adversities. Additionally, Pulido (2000) provides insight into how environmental racism intersects with urban development, which is critical in understanding the complex social and spatial inequalities in Detroit. By examining sustainability initiatives within this historical framework, this chapter sheds light on barriers to and drivers of meaningful social-ecological change, offering guidance for community organizers seeking transformative impact.

Research Questions

The following three questions guide this research:

1) How does the historical context of Detroit impact current approaches to climate injustice?
2) How is climate injustice being addressed at the community level in Detroit?
3) How are grassroots climate justice strategies different from, or similar to, grasstop approaches in Detroit?

Background - Environmental and Climate Injustice in Detroit

The intersection of industrialization, racial segregation, and state-wide economic policies has profoundly shaped Detroit's environmental landscape (Wright & Knott 2021), resulting in pervasive pollution and inequalities. This section examines the city's historical trajectory of environmental injustice, tracing its roots from the Civil War to contemporary neoliberal policies (Bullard 1997; Mohai and Saha 2019).

In his article, "Race and Environmental Justice in the United States," leading

environmental justice scholar Robert D. Bullard (1993) offers insights into the historical and contemporary dynamics of race and environmental inequality in the U.S. between the Civil War and World War I. He explains that Detroit's rapid industrialization led to significant air, water, and soil pollution (Bullard 1997; Brulle 1999). Due to housing and job segregation, he explains elsewhere, African Americans bore a disproportionate burden of this pollution (Bullard 1997), experiencing lower property values and higher rates of disease (Wright & Knott, 2021). Following World War II, capital flight, which refers to the movement of financial resources and investments out of the city, enabled manufacturers to evade regulatory compliance costs, leaving behind a legacy of polluted brownfield sites the city lacked the resources to remediate (Wright & Knott, 2021). This disinvestment further exacerbated environmental inequalities, while the threat of job loss if facilities shut down or changed their productivity to meet environmental regulations divided workers and environmentalists (Mohai & Saha, 2019).

Literature Review

Public Health Impacts and Grassroots Climate Solutions

Neoliberal policies—defined as a political and economic approach favoring deregulation, privatization, and reduced government intervention—have intensified environmental health risks for low-income Detroiters, disproportionately impacting African American women and children (Kurashige, 2017). In Detroit, these neoliberal shifts have intersected with a legacy of industrial pollution, housing segregation, and economic marginalization, creating substantial environmental justice challenges for marginalized communities (Schlosberg, 1998). The Detroit Water and Sewerage Department’s mass shut-offs between 2012 and 2015, which impacted over 100,000 residents, highlight how such policies exacerbate vulnerability as access to basic resources becomes increasingly precarious (Ho, 2016).

Taylor and Floyd (2007) emphasize the importance of environmental justice in public

health, noting how pollution and climate hazards impact marginalized communities more acutely. In Detroit, industrial emissions and the legacy of auto manufacturing have left an enduring impact on the health of residents in low-income neighborhoods, who face elevated risks of respiratory diseases and water contamination (Knott & Wright, 2012). Kimberly Hill Knott, former policy director for Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice, notes that the legacy of industrial pollution reflects broader patterns of environmental racism, leaving communities vulnerable to climate-related health impacts.

Grassroots organizations, including Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice, have spearheaded initiatives to address these environmental injustices, such as clean water access campaigns and air quality monitoring in neighborhoods affected by industrial pollution. Community-led efforts in Detroit seek to address climate-related public health risks through equitable resource distribution and sustainable urban planning (Taylor et al., 2016). These movements emphasize public accountability, pushing for policies that protect vulnerable populations from pollution and restore environmental quality in affected areas.

The compounded impacts of pollution and economic marginalization reveal the urgent need for grassroots, community-driven solutions to climate and environmental injustice. These solutions focus on equitable access to clean air, water, and green spaces, aiming to reduce public health disparities and foster resilience against climate threats. As Knott and Wright (2012) argue, addressing environmental health in Detroit requires acknowledging the city's history of exploitation and pursuing restorative justice practices that empower communities to advocate for sustainable and fair environmental practices.

Community-Led Solutions to Climate Inequity: Addressing Settler Colonialism and Gentrification

Settler colonialism, as defined by Wolfe (2006), involves the ongoing process of land

acquisition through displacement and replacement, embedding racial hierarchies into urban landscapes. In Detroit, this pattern is evident in the systematic appropriation of Indigenous lands for industrial development, which created enduring socio-economic disparities. This context reveals a historical pattern of prioritizing certain populations' political and economic interests, leading to displacement in both Indigenous and Black communities.

The impacts of settler colonialism align closely with those of gentrification, where urban development has displaced long-standing Black residents in Detroit, contributing to a loss of cultural cohesion and community erosion (Clay, 2013; Sugrue, 2005). The water crisis in Detroit exemplifies this climate injustice, disproportionately affecting African-American neighborhoods. Due to rising water bills, low-income communities have faced shut-offs, which activists argue favor corporate interests over residents' needs (House & Watson, 2016). This crisis has highlighted the urgent need for grassroots solutions that prioritize clean, affordable water and safeguard cultural heritage.

Gentrification and displacement exacerbate climate and social inequities, intensifying disparities while erasing neighborhood history (Kasman & Collier, 2019). Activists advocate for sustainable urban development that respects both property rights and Indigenous land claims, promoting resilience and equity across communities. The intersection of these issues emphasizes the need for policy shifts toward inclusive, grassroots-driven climate solutions that protect vulnerable populations and their access to resources like water, housing, and cultural heritage.

Grasstops Impact - Contrasting Top-Down and Grassroots Climate Solutions

Grasstops organizations, which include large non-profits, academic institutions, government agencies, and foundations, have substantial influence on climate policy through their resources, expertise, and capacity to drive large-scale initiatives (Romm, 2018). These organizations can advocate for systemic change, shape climate policy, and provide funding and

technical expertise that grassroots organizations may lack (Faulkner, 2007; Nordhaus, 2013). Grasstops groups often facilitate multi-stakeholder dialogues, create knowledge-sharing platforms, and build partnerships across sectors, which can amplify the reach and impact of climate solutions (Hadden & Harrison, 2018).

While grasstops efforts are beneficial in funding and research, their scale and bureaucratic structures can create distance from local communities and often overlook the specific needs and priorities of those most affected by climate change (Tilton, 2020). INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence (2007) critiques how large, well-funded organizations may unintentionally undermine grassroots movements, emphasizing how top-down approaches can sideline the agency and voices of local actors. The 2023 World Bank Report further underscores this, noting that executive processes and brand priorities in grasstops groups can hinder collaborative, ground-level decision-making, potentially stalling creative, community-centered solutions.

Grassroots initiatives, in contrast, are rooted in local knowledge and prioritize community-specific needs, often responding more directly and adaptively to environmental issues. Unlike grasstops organizations, grassroots groups typically involve community members in decision-making, fostering ownership and accountability within affected populations. This localized approach can produce more tailored, sustainable solutions that directly address immediate environmental and health challenges, as seen in Detroit's community-led water access campaigns and pollution monitoring efforts (Knott & Wright, 2012). These grassroots movements highlight the critical role of community-based strategies in climate action, demonstrating how local leadership can drive meaningful change on the ground, often with fewer resources but greater alignment to local needs and priorities.

Grassroots Contributions to Climate Justice

Grassroots organizations offer transformative, community-driven approaches to climate justice by addressing systemic inequities from the ground up. These groups leverage local knowledge, social capital, and a deep connection to community needs, fostering solutions that prioritize equity, inclusion, and climate resilience (Bulkeley & Fuller, 2012). Through diverse citizen engagement, grassroots efforts reflect the specific environmental, racial, and economic injustices experienced by marginalized communities, making them uniquely positioned to drive localized climate action (Goh, 2020). Boggs (2011), for instance, highlights Detroit's grassroots activism as an example of how community-led initiatives can build sustainable and equitable futures, emphasizing the importance of local agency in broader societal transformation (Boggs & Kurashige, 2011).

Grassroots solutions are essential in climate justice because they stem from the lived experiences of those most affected by climate change, promoting fair access to urban resources and highlighting specific local injustices. This bottom-up approach contrasts with grasstops organizations, which—despite their resources and influence—can sometimes overlook nuanced community needs due to their large-scale, systemic focus (Sze & London, 2008). Grassroots groups' proximity to communities enables practical, context-sensitive actions that complement broader policy initiatives, making them indispensable for effective climate justice work (Goulden & Bedsworth, 2019).

The Just Transition Principles developed by grassroots-led alliances like the Climate Justice Alliance (CJA) offer a structured framework for equitable community action. These principles encourage solutions that prioritize environmental integrity and social equity, rooted in the experiences of those directly impacted (Climate Justice Alliance, 2020). This approach contrasts with grasstops organizations, which tend to focus on high-level policy, research, and

funding. While grasstops entities are vital in advocating for systemic change, grassroots groups provide crucial local insights that ensure climate action remains equitable and responsive to community needs (Van Horn & Martinez, 2023).

Collaborations between grassroots and grasstops organizations create synergies that amplify the strengths of both. Grassroots organizations keep larger entities grounded in on-the-ground realities, while grasstops groups lend broader platforms and resources to elevate grassroots initiatives. Together, they can form a balanced approach essential for addressing climate change's multifaceted challenges (Urban Growers Collective, n.d.).

Methods

This study was initiated through conversations with Detroit-based climate and food justice activists seeking sustained partnerships with the University of Michigan. University staff and faculty, particularly from the Semester in Detroit program and the Ginsberg Center, engaged with community members to understand how such collaborations could evolve to support community-led efforts. Using a case study approach, this chapter examines two Detroit sustainability initiatives through stakeholder interviews and document analysis (Appendix C). The methodology emphasizes grassroots engagement, centering voices from impacted communities to foster authentic, equitable partnerships and drive social change.

Following a humanizing research approach (Paris, 2016), my work prioritizes inclusivity, focusing on those most affected by climate challenges and including their direct quotes throughout the analysis. As a Detroit community organizer and Anishinaabe climate advocate, my involvement supports a deeper understanding of participants' contexts. To ensure objectivity and credibility, I used memoing to document decisions, peer review for external insights, and member checking with participants to confirm data accuracy. Additionally, triangulation methods helped validate findings by cross-referencing interview data, observations, and documents.

The research juxtaposes two case studies to illustrate Detroit's diverse climate justice efforts: (1) the University of Michigan's Detroit Center for Innovation (DCI), a grasstop initiative supported by institutional partners, and (2) grassroots climate efforts led by Breath Free Detroit, Detroit Black Community Food Security Network, and the Boggs Center to Nurture Community Leadership. Analyzing these initiatives through document review, observations, and interviews provided insight into practical applications of climate justice in Detroit.

Data Collection

Document Analysis

I analyzed mission statements, strategic plans, and project reports to build a comprehensive understanding of the initiatives. These internal documents provided valuable information about the organization's values, goals, strategies, challenges, and community impacts. Some documents were sourced directly from the organizations' archives, while others were obtained from the Michigan State University Library or through online searches.

Participant Observations

Observations were gathered during grassroots organization and town hall meetings. Observing interactions and discussions in these settings, I documented non-verbal cues, relationship patterns, and community reactions to change initiatives—details often not captured in interviews. These observations were used to triangulate the data from interviews and document analysis, offering a more comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences and perspectives. Additionally, attending these meetings allowed me to witness firsthand the dynamics of community engagement and the implementation of climate initiatives. Observations were recorded in field notes, enriching the analysis and providing a fuller picture of the climate justice efforts in Detroit.

Interviews

Thirteen interviews were conducted with grassroots leaders pivotal in Detroit's environmental and justice organizations and leaders of the University of Michigan's Detroit Center for Innovation. These interviews utilized an interview guide (Appendix D) explored key themes such as climate justice, organizational strategies, community dynamics, and challenges in implementing climate justice principles. Open-ended questions allowed participants to share their perspectives, experiences, and insights, providing rich qualitative data for analysis. The interviews and observations from town hall and organizational meetings contributed to the case study analysis of Detroit's climate action grassroots organizations and the community engagement aspects of the University of Michigan's Detroit Innovation Center.

A survey was distributed to 120 environmental community activists in Detroit to develop the interview sample. The list was compiled through first-hand knowledge of local organizations, consultations with environmental groups, and an internet search to include newer organizations. The survey outlined the study's purpose and asked respondents to recommend local leaders with significant involvement in Detroit's climate justice initiatives. Eighty-eight percent of respondents named the same 30 organizations. The twenty most frequently mentioned organizations were invited for interviews; thirteen responded within the study timeframe.

Data Management and Analysis

The Dedoose software program was employed to store, organize, and query the data, serving as a valuable tool for managing and analyzing large volumes of qualitative information. This software facilitated systematic tracking of interview responses and participant comments from town hall meetings, allowing for meticulous coding and categorization. Using Dedoose, I handled complex data sets, ensured consistency in the coding process, and easily retrieved specific pieces of information. This technological support was crucial for managing the detailed

and nuanced data collected, ultimately contributing to the robustness and reliability of the research findings.

Analysis

To ground the findings in the data, I utilized ResearchTalk's Sort and Sift, Think and Shift method (Maietta, 2006), a multidimensional qualitative analysis approach informed by phenomenology, grounded theory, narrative research, and case study (Maietta et al., 2020). The Sort and Sift method include various techniques such as writing memos, monitoring topics in the data, inventorying quotations, and diagramming quotations and topics. This iterative process involves diving into the data to become familiar with it, stepping back to reflect on what has been learned, and then deciding how to proceed with the analysis. The main emphasis is on comparing the experiences of different participants and analyzing each participant's lived experience in relation to the research topic, allowing for monitoring topics vertically by participant and horizontally across participants.

Case Study Analysis

Qualitative data from case study materials, including mission statements, strategic plans, and project reports, underwent a thematic analysis following the Sort and Sift method. This systematic approach involved coding, categorizing, and organizing the data segments to uncover recurring themes, concepts, and patterns (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis aimed to identify key organizational values, goals, strategies, challenges, and community impacts related to climate justice initiatives. These insights were critical in understanding the broader context of the sustainability initiatives under study.

Interview Analysis

Interviews, conducted in person or over the phone, were recorded and transcribed before undergoing thematic analysis. A participant-centered approach was adopted to ensure that the

results faithfully reflected participants' own language and intended meaning (Morse et al., 2002). This approach involved coding phrases from interview responses, capturing subtle nuances and perspectives unique to each participant. Codes were developed to create categories that echoed participants' language, and the results incorporated multiple quotations to authentically convey participants' views and experiences. This method prioritizes participants' own words and perspectives, aiming to produce findings that accurately represent their insights.

Prior to reviewing the data, I composed a memo reflecting on the interviews and initial lessons learned. Each transcript was reviewed, and pulse quotations (i.e., quotations that highlighted key experiences and reflections related to climate justice) were identified. I wrote memos regarding each pulse quotation and composed a memo for each transcript, addressing the questions: (a) What did I learn from this data collection anecdote and (b) Why is this story important to this study? Statements capturing the main topics discussed and exemplary quotations were composed under the first question, while the second question described the importance of these topics in addressing the study's aims.

The statements from these memos were grouped into key topics, from which a uniting theme was developed. The grouped key topics were explored using matrices to compare the climate justice strategies and concerns among different participant groups.

Comparative Analysis

The comparative data analysis approach examined similarities and differences in the tactics, principles, and strategies of various leaders and organizations within the climate justice movement in Detroit (Ragin, 2014; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Grassroots organizers were interviewed extensively about their strategies, programs, and climate initiatives. These interviews delved into specific tactics used by organizers, such as community engagement methods, educational programs, and advocacy efforts.

Next, the coded data were compared across different organizations and leaders to highlight commonalities and divergences in their approaches. This comparative examination revealed key principles and tactics effective in various contexts, as well as those uniquely tailored to specific community needs. The thematic analysis provided insights into the adaptability and innovation inherent in local climate justice efforts.

Community and Participant Feedback

After establishing preliminary themes, the community advisory committee and all 13 interview participants were invited to separate sessions to discuss the findings. In the first group session with the community advisory committee, 4 climate justice-related themes were reviewed, and the four most relevant themes were selected for further exploration. In the second session with interview participants, four of the 13 attended, along with two community advisory committee members. Participants provided feedback on the phrasing of emergent themes and exemplary quotes and shared additional insights on how the key findings resonated with their experiences. I used this combined feedback to refine the themes and ensure the presented findings aligned with what participants identified as most important.

This rigorous, multi-layered analysis process ensured that the research findings were robust, trustworthy, and deeply rooted in the participants' experiences and the community context related to climate justice.

Summary of initiatives

The case study analysis examined qualitative data from mission statements, strategic plans, and project reports of various climate justice initiatives, focusing on key organizational values, goals, strategies, challenges, and community impacts. Among these initiatives, two prominent classes of examples emerged: grassroots-led organizations, and institutional initiatives like the proposed Detroit Center for Innovation (DCI). Grassroots organizations, such as the

People's Food Co-op, operate with limited funding raised independently, often facing uphill battles against displacement and lacking support from institutional partnerships. In contrast, institutional initiatives like the DCI receive external funding sources and support from prominent figures, but face criticism for their top-down approach and lack of grassroots partnerships, raising concerns about transparency and accountability.

Interviews conducted with participants further enriched the analysis, with a participant-centric approach ensuring that the results were grounded in participant language and intended meaning. These interviews delved into specific tactics used by organizers, such as community engagement methods, educational programs, and advocacy efforts, providing valuable insights into the strategies employed by different climate justice leaders and organizations. Comparative analysis across different organizations highlighted commonalities and divergences in their approaches, revealing key principles and tactics effective in various contexts underscoring the importance of inclusivity, transparency, and genuine community engagement in any development endeavor to address climate justice issues.

Results: Struggle for Justice - Stories from the Shadows of Power in Detroit Climate Initiatives

In exploring the perspectives of Detroit grassroots climate justice leaders, interviews and document analysis yielded several significant categories: (1) Grassroots Innovation, (2) Community Investment, (3) Effective Collaboration, and (4) Scalable Solutions. These insights illuminate the grassroots efforts within the city's climate initiatives, offering valuable perspectives often overlooked in conventional narratives.

Grassroots Innovation

The interviews underscored the vital role of grassroots innovation in addressing climate challenges at the local level. A participant from D-Town Farms shared: "One big issue is climate

change. Our political leaders are not actively engaging in the conversation nor looking for solutions to help Detroit's small or sustainable farmers in the future, even though we could be part of the climate change solution. There's no political will to do something about climate change at this point."

Grassroots organizations, like D-Town Farms, play a critical role in climate action by championing solutions that are specifically tailored to the needs and cultural context of their communities. These organizations operate on the principle that local knowledge and community involvement are crucial for addressing complex issues like climate change. For instance, D-Town Farms, under the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network (DBCFSN), utilizes urban agriculture not only to tackle food insecurity but also to promote sustainable practices that resonate with community values. Through techniques such as composting, crop rotation, and water conservation, D-Town Farms integrates sustainable agricultural practices that mitigate environmental impact while strengthening local food systems.

This approach contrasts sharply with top-down solutions typically favored by larger institutions or governmental bodies, which often rely on generalized, one-size-fits-all strategies. Grassroots initiatives like those spearheaded by DBCFSN challenge these conventional approaches by demonstrating that climate solutions can be more effective and enduring when they originate from within the community. Such bottom-up methods reflect a deep understanding of local environmental challenges and cultural values, making them practical and relevant to the community members they serve.

In addition, D-Town Farms and similar organizations contribute to community resilience by fostering local autonomy over food production and environmental resources. This localized control not only reduces reliance on external food sources but also empowers residents to address their own food needs sustainably. The emphasis on community-led action reinforces the idea that

solutions are most impactful when they empower communities to harness their own strengths and knowledge. By advocating for policies and practices that align with community needs, grassroots organizations like DBCFSN illustrate the powerful role that localized, community-centered approaches can play in achieving sustainable, long-term environmental change.

Community Investment

Community investment is essential for the success and sustainability of grassroots initiatives. The data highlighted several instances where community-led projects have garnered support and resources, emphasizing the importance of investing in local efforts.

For instance, the DBCFSN relies on partnerships for effective programming, including recruiting members, fundraising, architectural consulting, and business planning for their co-op and community kitchens. These partnerships often extend to educational institutions. An interviewee from the DBCFSN mentioned the importance of educational partnerships: "The DBCFSM youth program (food warriors) needs a variety of assistance: Campus visits to the U of M campus (any campus would be great - they also specifically mentioned the U of M Dearborn nature center). The interviewee that runs the food warriors program, said that we would like to see the environmental center at U of M Dearborn to have a field trip for the food warriors." Interviewee felt these visits would help to inspire their youth to pursue higher education.

This highlights the interconnectedness of educational partnerships, community development efforts, and how community investment can foster youth engagement and environmental education.

Collaboration emerged as a key theme, emphasizing the need for genuine partnerships between grassroots organizations and other stakeholders. These partnerships prioritize community voices and leverage collective expertise to address systemic injustices.

Educational Partnerships and Learning Journeys

The Boggs Center collaborates with higher education institutions like the University of Michigan and Grand Valley State University for campus visits, certification programs, and discussions on subjects such as labor, activism, and community organizing. The idea of hosting Learning Journeys also emerged as part of the effective collaborations theme. One participant noted:

> "Grand Valley State has done amazing stuff on citizenship, and the writing has informed their classes on Grace Lee Boggs. Would like to do a Learning Journey which would include tours and discussions over a 3 or 4 day retreat or workshop that brings everything together; farms, arts, and revolution, and the larger network."

The Director of the Boggs Center elaborated on this approach: "The Boggs Center would like to work with classes, student groups, faculty, departments that are creating and taking tours and hold relevant conversations about labor, the city of Detroit, activism, community organizing, and more; The tours and community discussions work well when different professors decide what to do. Go on tour first and then link that with a serious debriefing at the Boggs Center."

These collaborations not only educate but also build a bridge between academic institutions and community-based efforts, fostering deep engagement and reflection among participants.

Scalable Solutions

The interviews highlighted three notable examples of effective and scalable solutions devised to address the impacts of gentrification and mitigate potential future consequences. Each example offers valuable insights into grassroots action, behavior shifts, and collaborative efforts in combating gentrification. Dr. Monica White's work, particularly her book Freedom Farmers: Agricultural Resistance and the Black Freedom Movement (2018), provides a foundational

framework for understanding how grassroots initiatives build resilience and promote justice through cooperative efforts. In this text, White highlights the critical role of collective action, community self-reliance, and the integration of historical knowledge in addressing systemic inequities. Her focus on "resilience theory" and community-led solutions underscores the importance of leveraging local resources, fostering interdependence, and empowering communities to enact sustainable change. These principles are reflected in the subthemes discussed, which illustrate how Detroit-based collaborations embody the ethos of grassroots innovation that Dr. White advocates for.

D-Town Farms unites locals to address pressing needs. Malik Yakini and Mama Hanifa of D-Town Farms expressed enthusiasm about the potential partnership with the University of Michigan, "Yes, that could undoubtedly be advantageous. We're in the process of establishing the Detroit Food Co-op in the North end of Detroit, and it would be wonderful if the university could engage by renting space within the facility. This partnership could involve regular rental arrangements contributing to the monthly fees, assistance in space design and management, as well as support in space maintenance. Additionally, collaboration is sought in crafting business plans for both the co-op and community kitchens, encompassing two large commercial-grade kitchens and two smaller ones. Guidance in programming the space would also be invaluable." This partnership potential illustrates how academic institutions can support scalable grassroots solutions by providing financial, technical, and strategic support.

The Birwood Community House exemplifies behavior and value shifts aimed at combating climate injustice. By prioritizing employment opportunities aligned with community values, this initiative showcases the power of grassroots action in addressing underlying issues exacerbated by gentrification. It offers a compelling narrative for the scalability of grassroots solutions in combating climate injustice by strategically aligning employment opportunities with

community values. This not only addresses immediate socioeconomic needs but also tackles underlying issues exacerbated by gentrification, which often worsens environmental injustices. The emphasis on community-driven action underscores the potential for scalable solutions rooted in local empowerment and collaboration. However, to solidify its case for scalability, the initiative would benefit from presenting tangible results and evidence of its impact. Metrics such as increased local employment rates, economic growth within the community, testimonials from residents, and environmental improvements would provide concrete evidence of the initiative's effectiveness and potential for replication in other contexts.

Breathe Free Detroit underscores the importance of collaboration and partnerships in creating community-driven solutions, highlighting the efficacy of collective efforts in addressing the multifaceted effects of gentrification on communities. The initiative exemplifies the significance of collaboration and partnerships in fostering community-driven solutions by emphasizing collective efforts to tackle the impacts of gentrification. Engaging various stakeholders, including local residents, businesses, nonprofits, and governmental agencies, showcases how diverse perspectives and resources can be leveraged to address complex challenges. However, to strengthen its case for scalable solutions, Breathe Free Detroit would benefit from presenting tangible results and evidence of its impact, such as improvements in air quality, reductions in respiratory illnesses, testimonials from community members, and economic revitalization within affected neighborhoods.

Community Investment - Comparisons and Critique of Innovation Center and Existing Grassroots Organizations

"Is UM co-opting this work to promote a project devised by private, profit-seeking investors that will bypass the residents of Detroit and the communities they live in, thereby perpetuating the historically fraught and problematic record of the University of Michigan in the

city?" questioned a Dr. Stephen Ward, University of Michigan faculty, in his op ed criticizing the Universities Detroit Center for Innovation's (DCI). This sentiment resonates with the contrasting themes of institutional expansion and community empowerment revealed in our discussions, highlighting the tensions inherent in top-down versus bottom-up approaches to development. For instance, one interviewee pointed out the disparities in funding between outside startups or corporations receiving tax incentives and grant money versus grassroots efforts like the People's Food Co-op, which had to raise funds independently. Through these conversations, it became evident that community resistance to the DCI development reflects a preference for grassroots-led initiatives, suggesting that community-supported endeavors may offer a more effective pathway toward sustainable development.

"Lack of grassroots partnerships," stated an interviewee from the University of Michigan's Semester in Detroit program, expressing concerns about the partnerships involving U-M President Mark Schlissel, Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan, and billionaires Dan Gilbert and Stephen Ross. "There are apprehensions regarding the financial burden on the city, estimated to reach $750 million," they added. These apprehensions extend to the initial location chosen for the initiative—the "failed-jail site"—which has its own historical and financial controversies, as noted by John Gallagher (2019) in the *Detroit Free Press*. The closed-door planning process without input from long-time Detroit residents, community institutions, or the city council further exacerbated concerns.

Moreover, ethical concerns were raised about the DCI's focus on areas like artificial intelligence and cyber-security, particularly regarding its promotion of "surveillance capitalism," which exploits personal data. Critics view the proposed Center as deviating from principles of respect, solidarity, and justice emphasized by other University programs, including the Semester in Detroit program. However, a representative for the Center for Innovation defended the project,

highlighting the University's engagement with numerous ongoing programs and initiatives in the city, from collaborations with the Detroit Public Schools Community District to college-readiness programs like Wolverine Pathways.

Given Detroit's history of racial and economic oppression, critics believe the project might prioritize the interests of wealthy individuals over the community, raising concerns about respecting and empowering historic Black communities like Black Bottom and Paradise Valley. Calls for transparency and accountability were underscored in the form of concerns about tax manipulations and private interests benefiting at public expense. Dr. Stephan Ward emphasized the city of Detroit's importance in understanding conflicts created by capitalism's dependency on racial and economic oppression and inequity. He criticized the DCI as an inappropriate deployment of the University's social, economic, and intellectual capital.

A U-M faculty member raised questions about the University's commitment to engagement with Detroit and Detroiters based on respect, mutual benefit, and a commitment toward social justice. Doubts were voiced in multiple city town halls about whether the initiative perpetuates a problematic historical record between the University of Michigan and the city of Detroit, potentially prioritizing profit-driven motives over genuine community engagement. These criticisms reflect the initiative's challenges and underscore the importance of inclusivity, transparency, and genuine community engagement in any development endeavor. These criticisms encompassed **several key themes:**

Lack of Grassroots Partners

"UM researchers, students, staff, alumni and partners are engaged with roughly 300 ongoing programs and initiatives in the city and surrounding area, from the "cradle to career" collaboration with the Detroit Public Schools Community District at Marygrove College and Project Healthy Schools in Detroit middle schools to the Wolverine Pathways college-readiness

program and the nearby UM-Dearborn campus.”

Transparency and Accountability

Calls for a transparent conversation about projects like the "Detroit Center for Innovation" reflect broader concerns about inequitable development and systemic injustices. Critics highlight potential tax manipulations and the misuse of public resources to serve private interests, echoing patterns that have persisted since the colonization of Anishinaabe lands and the founding of Detroit. These dynamics are particularly troubling given Detroit's majority-Black population, which has frequently been excluded from decision-making processes that shape the city's future. As one critique notes, these initiatives too often prioritize private economic gain over public good, misusing institutions' social and intellectual capital in ways that perpetuate inequality.

Community Benefits and Inclusion

In response, there has been a growing call for development practices grounded in respect, mutual benefit, and social justice. As a University of Michigan faculty member stated, “In the past 25 years, a growing number of UM faculty and staff have put energy and thought into practicing principles of engagement with Detroit and Detroiters that are based on respect, mutual benefit, and a commitment toward social justice.” These principles serve as a foundation for addressing historical inequities and fostering development that centers the voices and needs of Detroit's communities.

The results of this study underscore the importance of four interrelated themes—grassroots innovation, community investment, effective collaboration, and scalable solutions—in addressing systemic injustices in Detroit. Transparent and accountable processes are essential for ensuring that development initiatives respect Detroit’s cultural and historical legacy while promoting equity. By fostering partnerships between grassroots organizations,

educational institutions, and other stakeholders, these efforts can serve as powerful models for meaningful and sustainable change. As the findings demonstrate, prioritizing these values not only addresses immediate challenges but also establishes frameworks for building an inclusive and equitable future.

Discussion

This discussion unpacks the findings in conversation with three research questions: (1) How does the historical context of Detroit impact current approaches to climate injustice? (2) How is climate injustice being addressed at the community level in Detroit? (3) How are these approaches different from or similar to grasstop approaches in Detroit?

Historical Context and Its Impact on Current Approaches to Climate Injustice

Detroit's legacy of industrialization, redlining, and systemic racism has entrenched environmental and social disparities, disproportionately affecting marginalized communities, particularly Indigenous and Black residents. These historical injustices provide the backdrop against which climate injustice is addressed today, necessitating contextually informed, community-driven solutions (Whyte, 2018; Vasudevan & Smith, 2020; Quizar, 2019).

Grassroots initiatives in Detroit build upon this historical understanding, leveraging the resilience and agency of affected communities to combat systemic inequities. For example, Solardarity responded to the removal of infrastructure by installing solar-powered streetlights in underserved areas, directly addressing community needs created by corporate divestment. This approach not only mitigates the effects of climate change but also fosters economic empowerment and strengthens community bonds.

By prioritizing the voices and experiences of Indigenous and Black communities, these initiatives challenge dominant narratives and advocate for policies rooted in environmental justice and equity. This reclamation of agency enables Detroiters to confront climate injustices

and co-create a sustainable and just future (Whyte, 2018; Safransky, 2014).

Community-Level Approaches to Addressing Climate Injustice

Community-driven approaches to climate justice in Detroit prioritize holistic, locally relevant, and sustainable solutions. Grassroots efforts, in particular, emphasize deep engagement with the communities they serve, fostering trust and understanding of local challenges. Unlike top-down academic or corporate models, these initiatives remain embedded within the communities, allowing for tailored, effective responses (Boggess & Kim, 2016; Sacks, 2017).

Scalable Solutions

Scalable solutions offer a pathway for maximizing impact while maintaining grassroots integrity. The University of Michigan, for instance, can leverage its resources, expertise, and networks to support grassroots efforts through funding, technical assistance, and capacity building. This collaboration can amplify the reach and effectiveness of community-driven solutions, addressing issues such as gentrification and climate injustice:

- Community Land Trusts (CLTs): CLTs provide an effective strategy for preserving affordable housing and ensuring community control over land use. By preventing displacement and fostering stability, CLTs empower residents to make long-term decisions for their communities. Supporting existing CLTs in Detroit offers an opportunity for universities to promote sustainable, community-led growth (Boggess & Kim, 2016).
- Affordable Housing Cooperatives: These cooperatives provide an alternative to traditional housing models by empowering residents to collectively manage their living spaces. Supporting such cooperatives helps preserve affordability and community cohesion, offering a countermeasure to gentrification (Boggess & Kim, 2016).

- Community-Based Economic Development: Promoting local entrepreneurship, supporting small businesses, and investing in workforce development programs can foster economic resilience. These initiatives create economic opportunities within the community, empowering residents and reducing vulnerability to displacement (Boggess & Kim, 2016; Johnson, 2015).

Differences and Similarities Between Grassroots and Grasstop Approaches

Grassroots organizations and grasstop entities differ significantly in their approaches to addressing climate justice. Grassroots efforts are deeply embedded within communities, allowing for a nuanced understanding of local histories and systemic challenges. In contrast, grasstop organizations often lack this localized perspective, leading to solutions that may not address the root causes of injustice (Whyte, 2018).

The historical disenfranchisement of Indigenous and Black communities has excluded them from environmental policy and urban development decisions, perpetuating inequities. Grassroots organizations seek to rectify this by advocating for equitable development and empowering marginalized voices in decision-making processes (Vasudevan & Smith, 2020; Quizar, 2019).

Universities as Partners in Climate Equity

Academic institutions, like the University of Michigan, can play a pivotal role in advancing climate equity by partnering with grassroots organizations. Through collaborations that leverage university expertise and resources, institutions can amplify community-led initiatives, bridge resource gaps, and promote equitable, innovative solutions to climate injustice.

By ensuring that such partnerships are informed by the lived experiences of marginalized communities, universities can strengthen grassroots efforts and contribute to a more just and sustainable Detroit.

Detroit's historical context is integral to understanding and addressing modern climate injustices. Grassroots initiatives, rooted in historical awareness and community engagement, provide effective, contextually relevant solutions. By fostering collaborations between grassroots organizations and academic institutions, these efforts can drive systemic change, promoting equity and sustainability for all Detroiters.

Below is a table on how a university could assist with the tasks set out by the community organizations:

Cooperative Building and Development	Educational Partnerships and Programming	Youth Engagement	Community Discussions and Knowledge Sharing	Digital Presence and Outreach
Collaborative Projects: Universities can incorporate real-world projects related to building and development into their curriculum, allowing students to work directly with the community organization.	Collaborative Education Programs: Partner with the community organization to design courses, workshops, and certification programs tailored to their needs.	Internships and Volunteering: Create opportunities for students to intern or volunteer with youth programs, assisting in tutoring, program organization, and mentorship.	Event Sponsorships: Host and sponsor community discussions, lectures, and seminars at the university, using its infrastructure and reach.	Technical Assistance: Computer science or IT departments can assist in website development, making it more user-friendly and integrated with social media.
Expertise Access: Universities can provide access to faculty with expertise in business planning, architectural consulting, and fundraising strategies.	Campus Visits: Regularly host community members for campus visits, workshops, and lectures, especially catering to the youth programs mentioned.	Field Trips: Organize field trips focused on the mentioned areas of interest, leveraging university resources and expertise.	Faculty Engagement: Involve faculty from various departments to participate in and guide discussions and tours.	Content Creation: Engage journalism and communication students to help create, curate, and manage content for the website.
Research: University students and researchers can conduct feasibility studies and market analyses to inform the co-op's strategic direction.	Student Engagement: Engage student groups or clubs in facilitating and participating in "Learning Journeys" and community discussions.			

Table 1: Types of Collaborations Preferred by Grassroots Organizations

Conclusion

From the insights from the research findings, it is evident that grassroots initiatives hold promising potential for addressing gentrification and fostering community stability. The emergence of effective and scalable community-driven models like community-driven media and

localized food systems showcases the power of local empowerment in combatting displacement and building resilient communities. With their established connections and deep understanding of community needs, these grassroots efforts contrast with more top-down or grasstop approaches.

However, introducing initiatives like the "Detroit Center for Innovation" highlights the complexities and challenges of fostering meaningful university-community collaboration (Davis & Smith, 2017). Despite its ambitious goals, the proposed center has faced many criticisms ranging from concerns about partnerships and financial implications to questions about its alignment with community values and historical engagement. The scrutiny over its partnerships, concerns about surveillance capitalism, potential socio-economic bypassing, and questions about transparency and accountability emphasize the need for inclusivity and genuine community engagement in university-led projects.

Amidst the criticism, universities have a significant opportunity to play a transformative role in community development. The expressed needs of community organizations for cooperative building, educational partnerships, youth engagement, and skill development, among others, highlight areas where universities, with their expertise and resources, can offer substantial support. The synergy between the objectives of community organizations and the resources of universities is a pathway for mutually beneficial collaborations that empower communities and contribute to sustainable development.

The criticisms and concerns surrounding the Detroit Center for Innovation illuminate the importance of aligning university initiatives with community needs and values. The Detroit Center for Innovation, a future world-class research and education center anchored by the University of Michigan, will be built in The District Detroit, situated between the city's downtown and Midtown. According to then-University of Michigan President Mark Schlissel, the DCI will enhance the university's

ability to drive innovation across various fields (Jordan, 2021). Schlissel added that the center uniquely provides a space for the university to engage with industry, nonprofit, and community partners to develop the most relevant academic programs and identify research opportunities of mutual interest and benefit. But developing trust, ensuring transparency, and respecting local histories and cultures are paramount in fostering successful collaborations. The potential for meaningful impact is significant but necessitates a commitment to social justice, community empowerment, and equitable development.

The research findings offer a nuanced perspective on the intersection of grassroots innovation, university engagement, and community development. The promise of grassroots solutions to gentrification and the potential for impactful university-community alliances coexist with challenges of transparency, trust, and alignment of values. Navigating these complexities is essential in realizing the vision of more equitable and resilient communities in Detroit and beyond.

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APPENDIX A: JUST TRANSITION PRINCIPLES

There are existing principles, including the Principles of Environmental Justice and Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing, that have been important in guiding our work. The Just Transition principles below are an attempt to consolidate and synthesize various Just Transition principles from among CJA members and allies, built off the deep work and discussions amongst ourselves. Understanding that Just Transition will look different in different places, we believe a core set of shared principles can strengthen our collective work.

Buen Vivir - Buen Vivir means that we can live well without living better at the expense of others. Workers, community residents, women and Indigenous Peoples around the world have a fundamental human right to clean, healthy and adequate air, water, land, food, education, and shelter. We must have just relationships with each other and with the natural world, of which we are a part. The rights of peoples, communities and nature must supersede the rights of the individual.

Meaningful Work - A Just Transition centers on the development of human potential, creating opportunities for people to learn, grow, and develop to their full capacities and interests. We are all born leaders, and a regenerative economy supports and nurtures that leadership. In the process, we are transforming ourselves, each other, our communities, and our society as a whole. Meaningful work is life-affirming.

Self Determination - All peoples have the right to participate in decisions that impact their lives. This requires democratic governance in our communities, including our workplaces. Communities must have the power to shape their economies, as producers, as consumers, and in our relationships with each other. Not only do we have the right to self-determination, but self-determination is one of our greatest tools to realize the world we need. The people who are

most affected by the extractive economy — the frontline workers and the fenceline communities — have the resilience and expertise to be in the leadership of crafting solutions.

Equitable Redistribution of Resources and Power - We must work to build new systems that are good for all people, and not just a few. Just Transition must actively work against and transform current and historic social inequities based on race, class, gender, immigrant status and other forms of oppression. Just Transition fights to reclaim capital and resources for the regeneration of geographies and sectors of the economy where these inequities are most pervasive.

Regenerative Ecological Economics - Just Transition must advance ecological resilience, reduce resource consumption, restore biodiversity and traditional ways of life, and undermine extractive economies, including capitalism, that erode the ecological basis of our collective well-being. This requires a re-localization and democratization of primary production and consumption by building up local food systems, local clean energy, and smallscale production that are sustainable economically and ecologically. This also means producing to live well without living better at the expense of others.

Culture and Tradition - Capitalism has forced many communities to sacrifice culture and tradition for economic survival. It has also defaced and destroyed land held as sacred. Just Transition must create inclusionary spaces for all traditions and cultures, recognizing them as integral to a healthy and vibrant economy. It should also make reparations for land that has been stolen and/or destroyed by capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy, genocide and slavery.

Solidarity - A Just Transition must be liberatory and transformative. The impacts of the extractive economy knows no borders.

APPENDIX B: ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE & JEMEZ PRINCIPLES

Delegates to the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit held on October 24-27, 1991, in Washington DC, drafted and adopted 17 **principles of Environmental Justice**. Since then, The Principles have served as a defining document for the growing grassroots movement for environmental justice.

PREAMBLE

WE, THE PEOPLE OF COLOR, gathered together at this multinational People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, to begin to build a national and international movement of all peoples of color to fight the destruction and taking of our lands and communities, do hereby re-establish our spiritual interdependence to the sacredness of our Mother Earth; to respect and celebrate each of our cultures, languages and beliefs about the natural world and our roles in healing ourselves; to ensure environmental justice; to promote economic alternatives which would contribute to the development of environmentally safe livelihoods; and, to secure our political, economic and cultural liberation that has been denied for over 500 years of colonization and oppression, resulting in the poisoning of our communities and land and the genocide of our peoples, do affirm and adopt these Principles of Environmental Justice:

1) Environmental Justice affirms the sacredness of Mother Earth, ecological unity and the interdependence of all species, and the right to be free from ecological destruction.

2) Environmental Justice demands that public policy be based on mutual respect and justice for all peoples, free from any form of discrimination or bias.

3) Environmental Justice mandates the right to ethical, balanced and responsible uses of land and renewable resources in the interest of a sustainable planet for humans and other living things.

4) Environmental Justice calls for universal protection from nuclear testing, extraction, production and disposal of toxic/hazardous wastes and poisons and nuclear testing that threaten the fundamental right to clean air, land, water, and food.

5) Environmental Justice affirms the fundamental right to political, economic, cultural and environmental self-determination of all peoples.

6) Environmental Justice demands the cessation of the production of all toxins, hazardous wastes, and radioactive materials, and that all past and current producers be held strictly accountable to the people for detoxification and the containment at the point of production.

7) Environmental Justice demands the right to participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making, including needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement and evaluation.

8) Environmental Justice affirms the right of all workers to a safe and healthy work environment without being forced to choose between an unsafe livelihood and unemployment. It also affirms the right of those who work at home to be free from environmental hazards.

9) Environmental Justice protects the right of victims of environmental injustice to receive full compensation and reparations for damages as well as quality health care.

10) Environmental Justice considers governmental acts of environmental injustice a violation of international law, the Universal Declaration On Human Rights, and the United Nations Convention on Genocide.

11) Environmental Justice must recognize a special legal and natural relationship of Native Peoples to the U.S. government through treaties, agreements, compacts, and covenants affirming sovereignty and self-determination.

12) Environmental Justice affirms the need for urban and rural ecological policies to clean up and rebuild our cities and rural areas in balance with nature, honoring the cultural integrity of all our communities, and provided fair access for all to the full range of resources.

13) Environmental Justice calls for the strict enforcement of principles of informed consent, and a halt to the testing of experimental reproductive and medical procedures and vaccinations on people of color.

14) Environmental Justice opposes the destructive operations of multi-national corporations.

15) Environmental Justice opposes military occupation, repression and exploitation of lands, peoples and cultures, and other life forms.

16) Environmental Justice calls for the education of present and future generations which emphasizes social and environmental issues, based on our experience and an appreciation of our diverse cultural perspectives.

17) Environmental Justice requires that we, as individuals, make personal and consumer choices to consume as little of Mother Earth's resources and to produce as little waste as possible; and make the conscious decision to challenge and reprioritize our lifestyles to ensure the health of the natural world for present and future generations.

The Proceedings to the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit are available from the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice, 475 Riverside Dr. Suite 1950, New York, NY 10115.

Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing Meeting hosted by Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice (SNEEJ), Jemez, New Mexico, Dec. 1996 Activists meet on Globalization On December 6-8, 1996, forty people of color and European-American representatives met in Jemez, New Mexico, for the "Working Group Meeting on Globalization and Trade." The Jemez meeting was hosted by the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice with the intention of hammering out common understandings between participants from different cultures, politics and organizations. The following "Jemez Principles" for democratic organizing were adopted by the participants.

#1 Be Inclusive If we hope to achieve just societies that include all people in decision-making and assure that all people have an equitable share of the wealth and the work of this world, then we must work to build that kind of inclusiveness into our own movement in order to develop alternative policies and institutions to the treaties policies under neoliberalism. This requires more than tokenism, it cannot be achieved without diversity at the planning table, in staffing, and in coordination. It may delay achievement of other important goals, it will require discussion, hard work, patience, and advance planning. It may involve conflict, but through this conflict, we can learn better ways of working together. It's about building alternative institutions, movement building, and not compromising out in order to be accepted into the anti-globalization club.

#2 Emphasis on Bottom-Up Organizing To succeed, it is important to reach out into new constituencies, and to reach within all levels of leadership and membership base of the organizations that are already involved in our networks. We must be continually building and strengthening a base which provides our credibility, our strategies, mobilizations, leadership development, and the energy for the work we must do daily.

#3 Let People Speak for Themselves We must be sure that relevant voices of people directly affected are heard. Ways must be provided for spokespersons to represent and be responsible to the affected constituencies. It is important for organizations to clarify their roles, and who they represent, and to assure accountability within our structures.

#4 Work Together In Solidarity and Mutuality Groups working on similar issues with compatible visions should consciously act in solidarity, mutuality and support each other's work. In the long run, a more significant step is to incorporate the goals and values of other groups with your own work, in order to build strong relationships. For instance, in the long run, it is more important that labor unions and community economic development projects include the issue of environmental sustainability in their own strategies, rather than just lending support to the environmental organizations. So communications, strategies and resource sharing is critical, to help us see our connections and build on these.

#5 Build Just Relationships Among Ourselves We need to treat each other with justice and respect, both on an individual and an organizational level, in this country and across borders. Defining and developing "just relationships" will be a process that won't happen overnight. It must include clarity about decision-making, sharing strategies, and resource distribution. There are clearly many skills necessary to succeed, and we need to determine the ways for those with different skills to coordinate and be accountable to one another.

#6 Commitment to Self-Transformation As we change societies, we must change from operating on the mode of individualism to community-centeredness.

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEWEES

Detroit Black Community Food Security Network	The Detroit Black Community Food Security Network was founded to ensure that Detroit's African American population participated in the food movement. Since we are the vast majority of the population in Detroit, we are in the leadership of that movement locally.
Detroit People's Food Co-op	The Detroit People's Food Co-op (DPFC) is an African American-led, member-owned grocery cooperative, which will be located in the historic North End at 8324 Woodward Avenue.
James and Grace Lee Boggs Center	To nurture the transformational leadership capacities of individuals and organizations committed to creating productive, sustainable, ecologically responsible, and just communities.
Birwood Community House	The Birwood Community House community is committed to local sustainability and community inclusion, nurturing young people and neighbors from across the city and our country based on love and creating critical connections.
The East Michigan Environmental Action Council (EMEAC)	The EMEAC empowers communities in southeast Michigan, especially Detroit and other Black and Brown communities, to protect the land, air, water, and diversity of life through

Table 1: Interviewees

Table 1 (cont'd)

	informed action.
Cass Corridor Commons (CCC)	CCC is situated on the intersection of Cass and Forest in Detroit, MI, and holds a special significance for the activist community. This importance stems from multiple factors, including the architectural value of the building, its storied history of activism, and its pivotal role as a community anchor in the face of ongoing gentrification.
Detroit is Different	The Detroit is Different grassroots media collaboration is about exposing artistry, business, ideas, and dynamic people, places, and things that make Detroit a mecca.
University of Michigan (U-M) Detroit Center for Innovation (DCI)	U-M representatives for the DCI
The University of Michigan College of African and African American Studies	Residential College faculty and staff were chosen as they have been critical and outspoken and published critiques about the Center for Innovation.
Project Manager for the Center of Innovation, the University of Michigan	Director Craig Regester was chosen as a University representative to gain perspective on the Center for Innovation's plans for community benefit.

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW GUIDE

- What are the most pressing environmental issues facing your city? Specifically, what role does your organization play in addressing these issues?
- How do you see your organization contributing to a transition toward climate justice in your community? Are there specific initiatives or actions you have planned or are currently implementing?
- In your view, what are some of the biggest challenges facing organizations and individuals who want to take action on climate change? How is your organization addressing these challenges?
- How do you engage with and involve local community members in your work toward climate justice?
- What resources, partnerships, or support do you need to achieve your goals for climate justice?
- How do you measure the impact of your organization's work towards climate justice?
- What advice would you give to other organizations or individuals who want to get involved in environmental activism or take action on climate change?
- Please tell me about your organization's current needs and goals.
- What have been your past experiences with the University of Michigan? Have you collaborated with them before?
- In your opinion, what types of collaborations with a University would benefit your organization and its goals most?

- Have you heard of the University of Michigan's Center for Innovation? What is your experience with this initiative?
- What is your relationship to the city of Detroit and how has the city's history informed your climate work?

CHAPTER 3

FUTURESCAPE: CRAFTING A JUST CLIMATE SUSTAINABILITY FRAMEWORK

Abstract

This guide explores sustainability theory and practice, culminating in the just climate sustainability frame, bridging theoretical frameworks with actionable strategies for inclusive and just sustainability. Grounded in feminist and Indigenous climate justice theories and centered on community voices, it navigates the intersection of theory and action in climate justice. Embracing, feminist, Indigenous, and queer theory, the guide advocates for a revolutionary shift towards dismantling systemic inequities and fostering inclusivity and sustainability. Drawing from grassroots engagement and pragmatic approaches, it highlights the transformative potential of community-driven initiatives in addressing climate challenges. The guide emphasizes the importance of inclusive research practices and collective mobilization for justice by bridging grasstops and grassroots approaches. Ultimately, it envisions a future shaped by interdisciplinary collaboration and grassroots activism, where marginalized voices are centered, and justice and sustainability are realized for all.

Introduction

This guide, Futurescapes, offers a robust roadmap for Just Climate practice, firmly anchored in feminist, Indigenous, and queer theory, aimed at bridging theory with practical action. It stems from a crucial recognition: in conventional environmental problem-solving and climate justice initiatives, minority voices are often marginalized. Specifically, feminist, Indigenous, and queer frameworks provide inclusive, community-bound perspectives, essential

for democratizing climate justice discourse. Throughout this guide, I refer to grassroots communities, communities, and activists. I am specifically referring to the grassroots members and organizations that were interviewed as part of this dissertations, which includes, but is not completely limited to Grassroots Global Justice, Indigenous Environmental Network, The Climate Justice Alliance, and Climate Justice Organizations in Detroit, Michigan. As practitioners and scholars embrace these frameworks, they adopt new, scalable approaches to address systemic inequities, fostering transformative change from grassroots levels upwards. This guide serves as a guidebook for academics, community organizers, and climate justice practitioners, capturing the inclusive and grassroots spirit essential for meaningful progress. Informed by recommendations from grassroots participants, the guide focuses on benchmarks for just climate solutions, fostering equal collaborations between grassroots and grasstops organizations, and nurturing creativity in sustainability discourse. It's structured to integrate grassroots organizational practices with academic theory, fostering a symbiotic partnership wherein theory informs practice and vice versa. By blending the pragmatism of grassroots organizing with the wisdom of feminist and Indigenous ideologies, this guide empowers individuals and communities to co-create a fair and sustainable future. It explores Disability Justice, Indigenous, Feminist, Anti-capitalist, and Queer Ecology futures, providing both academic foundations and practical guidance. Ultimately, this guide provides a nuanced and comprehensive view of climate justice, emphasizing collaboration and humility. It urges readers to relinquish the role of the "knower" and embrace that of the listener, fostering open-hearted and open-minded engagement. This guidebook serves as a compass for navigating the complexities of climate justice, offering readers the tools to be effective collaborators in building a more just and sustainable future.

How to Engage with the Futurescapes Guide

This guide is structured as a navigational tool for academics, community organizers, and climate justice practitioners. It systematically explores multifaceted theoretical frameworks and practical applications pertinent to the climate justice discourse. By becoming more inclusive and sensitive to the voices from the bottom up, this shift represented a major step towards democratizing the conversation surrounding social justice. The goal in writing this guide is to capture this inclusive and grassroots atmosphere. There are multiple ways to engage with this guide:

Theoretical Frameworks

This segment unfolds an in-depth analysis of theoretical underpinnings, embracing Indigenous, feminist, and anti-capitalist perspectives. Each framework is critically examined to elucidate its relevance and implications within the domain of climate justice.

Pragmatic Approaches to Envisioning Justice-Centered Sustainability

This section offers a mosaic of innovative methodologies and conceptual paradigms aimed at envisioning sustainable futures imbued with principles of justice. Noteworthy discussions encompass Indigenous futurism, queer ecology, and collaborative community organizing.

Navigation Facilitation

The guidebook's subdivision into discrete subsections facilitates focused inquiry and expeditious navigation. Whether exploring into theoretical exegeses or perusing practical directives for community mobilization, readers can adeptly compendium's contents.

Operationalization

Engage with the guidebook by applying its precepts to real world contexts. Employ the provided discussion prompts as catalysts for dialectical inquiry and imaginative ideation, propelling the envisioning of justice-oriented sustainable futures within local and global communities.

Collaborative Discourse

The guidebook engenders scholarly collaboration and participatory dialogue among its readership. It encourages the exchange of insights, fosters interdisciplinary collaboration, and coalesces efforts toward effectuating transformative climate justice initiatives.

Iterative Learning and Adaptation

The Just climate sustainability frame is not stagnant. It requires continual learning and adaptive praxis: embracing intellectual openness, interrogating prevailing orthodoxies, and demonstrating receptivity to evolving approaches commensurate with emergent exigencies.

Holistic Indicators for Just Climate Sustainability Frame

Based on the theory that is incorporated into the climate justice sustainability frame, this section explores how the climate justice sustainability frame could be implemented. The exploration includes 1. a graphic depiction of the frame, 2. list of indicators, and 3. Theory and explanation of where each indicator came from. The Just climate sustainability frame is a tool that could transcend traditional sustainability assessments by incorporating a nuanced set of key principles rooted in environmental justice, climate justice, Just Transition, feminist economy, Indigenous economy, and regenerative economy frameworks (Raworth, 2017). By integrating these diverse perspectives, the Grassroots Climate Justice Innovation Theory principles form a comprehensive assessment tool to achieve a holistic understanding of justice outcomes and

findings in transitioning to a sustainable and equitable future. Below, the general principles for the Just Climate Sustainability Frame are outlined, followed by a table and pie graph illustrating the major components of the frame. The table and pie chart visually represent how the just climate sustainability frame can be applied. Using the indicators, any climate change proposal, program, initiative, or organization can be assigned a number (1 – 6, with 6 indicating a highly justice-based initiative) to gauge its potential contribution to a just society and sustainable planet. These assessments can then inform recommendations for further action and improvement.

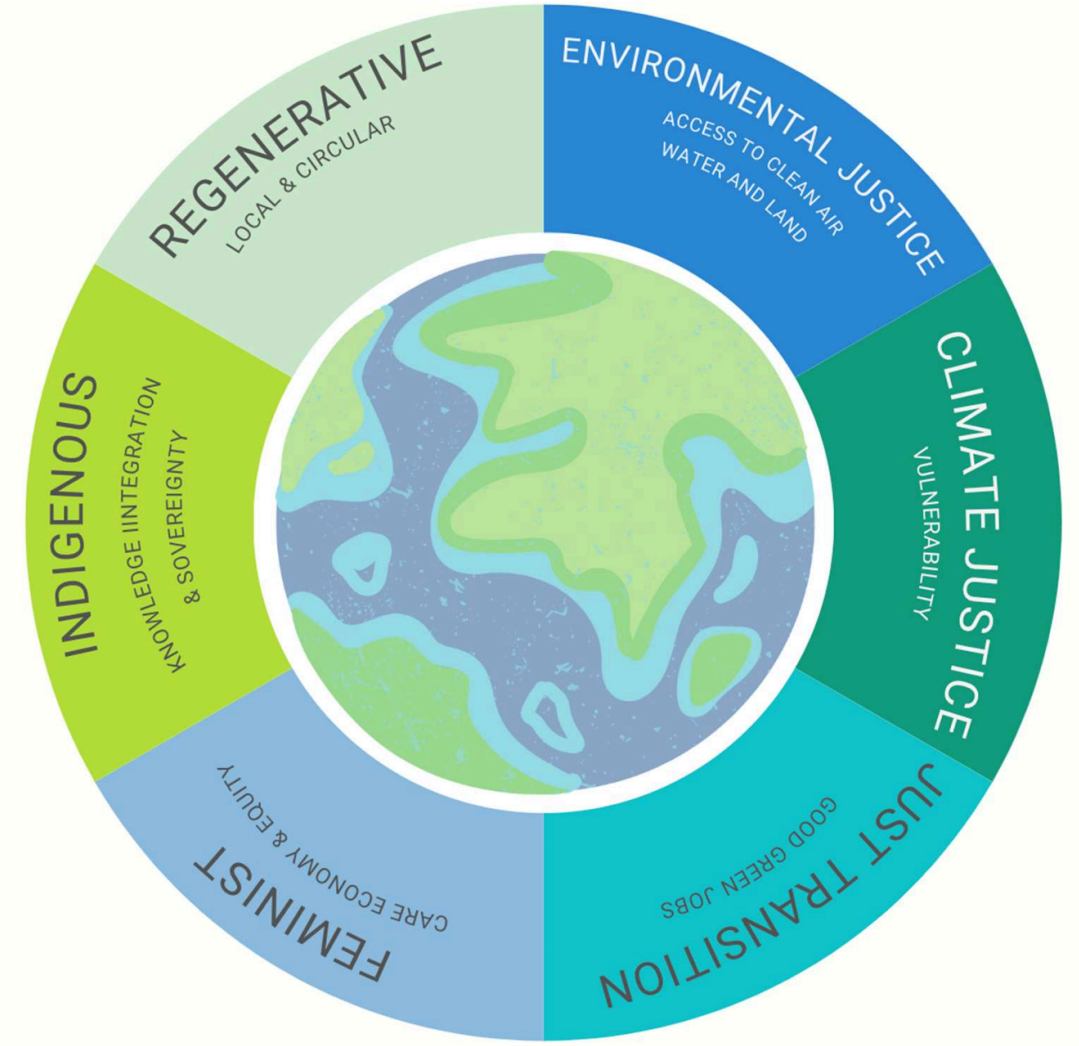

Figure 1: Visual Pie-Chart Representation of Just Climate Sustainability Frame Indicators

Environmental Justice	Prioritize Marginalized Communities: Focus on the needs and voices of marginalized communities, especially communities of color and indigenous groups. Build Community Power: Empower communities in decision-making processes related to sustainable development.
	Equitable Distribution of Benefits and Burdens: Ensure equity in access to clean water, air, healthy food, and benefits such as green jobs and affordable housing. Procedural Justice: Ensure fairness in legal and administrative procedures, ensuring that all stakeholders have equal access to justice.
Climate Justice	Evaluate Climate Vulnerability: Assess vulnerability to climate change impacts, focusing on frontline communities and those most affected. Adaptation Equity: Measure equitable access to resources and strategies for adapting to climate change impacts.
	Global Justice: Assess international cooperation and contributions to global climate justice, considering historical responsibilities.
Just Transition	Job Equity: Track the quality, accessibility, and inclusivity of jobs created in the transition to a low-carbon economy. Protect Workers: Prioritize protection and retraining of workers in impacted industries. Worker Rights: Protect and enhance workers' rights during the transition.
	Community Resilience: Assess community-level resilience measures, including education, health, and social infrastructure. Collaboration: Foster inclusive, transparent, and participatory collaboration among stakeholders.
Feminist Economy	Gender Equity: Evaluate policies and initiatives promoting gender equity in decision-making, employment, and resource distribution. Reproductive Justice: Measure access to reproductive rights and healthcare.
	Care Economy: Recognize unpaid care work as a valuable contribution to the economy.
Indigenous Economy	Indigenous Rights: Evaluate respect for Indigenous rights, including land sovereignty, in climate policies. Traditional Ecological Knowledge Integration: Encourage integration of traditional ecological knowledge into climate strategies.
	Indigenous Economic Sovereignty: Assess initiatives supporting Indigenous economic sovereignty and self-determination.
Regenerative Economy	Ecosystem Regeneration: Measure efforts to regenerate ecosystems, including reforestation, habitat restoration, and sustainable agriculture. Circular Economy Practices: Assess adoption and promotion of circular economy principles, reducing waste and promoting sustainable resource use.
	Biodiversity Protection: Evaluate policies and actions to protect and enhance biodiversity.

Table 1: Just Climate Sustainability Indicators

Theory Supporting the Just Climate Sustainability Frame

In the discourse surrounding sustainability, there is a prevailing narrative focused on meeting present needs while ensuring the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Purvis et al. 2019). However, this emphasis on environmental considerations often neglects social and economic equity, potentially leading to adverse consequences, such as the displacement and disempowerment of marginalized communities. In response to this critical gap, the concept of a Just Climate Frame emerges as a pivotal framework advocating for a holistic and equitable shift toward a sustainable economy that benefits all facets of society. The Just climate sustainability frameserves as an assessment tool and a guide. The below theory was applied to inform the suggested practices that follow:

Environmental Justice Theory

Environmental Justice and Sustainability

The Environmental Justice (EJ) movement emerged as a response to the disproportionate siting of toxic waste facilities in low-income communities of color, highlighting the intersection of environmental and social injustices (Bullard, 1993). Unlike traditional environmentalism, which often prioritizes the protection of wilderness areas, the EJ movement focuses on safeguarding human communities where they live, work, and play. Over the years, the scope of the EJ movement has expanded to address global disparities in economic development and environmental degradation (Pellow & Brulle, 2005). Drawing inspiration from civil rights, Tidball, 2016). However, their impact on national and international platforms, such as the United Nations Climate Change Conference, underscores their pivotal role in elevating sustainable solutions (UNEP, 2019). Equity and Sustainability in Environmental Justice: The strength of the EJ movement lies in its commitment to fairness, advocating for social and environmental

sustainability by challenging environmental injustices and promoting equitable access to resources (Bullard, 1993). Aligning with the goals of a Justice-Based Sustainability Index could provide a framework for accountability and action toward a just and sustainable future. Initiatives for Future Generations: public health, labor, and community organizing efforts, the movement takes a multidisciplinary approach to confront environmental injustice.

Grassroots Environmental Justice Organizations and Just Climate Sustainability

Grassroots action is integral to the EJ movement, as it empowers communities to address their local environmental issues and navigate the economic, social, and political barriers exacerbating environmental risks (United Nations Environmental Programme, n.d.). By tapping into community insights and democratic processes, grassroots initiatives provide valuable guidance for formulating policies that promote sustainability and counteract environmental degradation. Despite their theoretical significance, grassroots initiatives often lack comprehensive research on their genesis, determinants of success, and achieved outcomes (Bebbington et al., 2019; Krasny & Initiatives targeting poverty alleviation for vulnerable populations, such as children and the elderly, align with the principle of considering the consequences of present actions on future generations (Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, 2019; Hanna et al., 2021). By promoting community control and equitable access to energy resources, these initiatives contribute to building sustainable and resilient communities.

Sustainability Solutions

Policies promoting sustainable development, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and investing in renewable energy are essential for building sustainable and resilient communities (UNDP, 2019). These initiatives contribute to mitigating climate change impacts and fostering long-term sustainability. Education and Awareness: Increasing knowledge about environmental

issues is crucial for promoting informed decision-making and active participation in sustainable practices (UNESCO, 2021). Education and awareness efforts play a vital role in fostering individual and collective understanding of environmental challenges and solutions. Climate Justice Theory The Nationwide Climate Justice Alliance has developed Climate Justice principles, framing the discourse on environmental justice and facilitating a fair transition to a low-carbon economy (Climate Justice Alliance, 2024). These principles, grounded in climate justice theory, address the interplay of social inequality, environmental degradation, and climate change, highlighting the disproportionate impact on marginalized communities, including workers, women, Indigenous Peoples, and low-income residents.

Climate Justice Theory

Climate change disproportionately affects vulnerable communities, including those already marginalized by poverty and exclusion from global economic benefits (IPCC report, 2024). Historical emissions have been predominantly from affluent nations, exacerbating global inequality (Richie, 2019). Moreover, structural inequalities such as racism exacerbate climate impacts, amplifying disparities within and across societies (Macquarie, 2022). Climate justice theory identifies climate change as a symptom of unfair economic, social, and political systems, emphasizing the ethical imperative for climate action and addressing global inequality (Macquarie, 2022).

Disability Justice Theory

Disability justice theory emerged as a significant influence on climate justice activism, highlighted by its mention in interviews with climate justice activists. Among interview participants, disability justice was cited as a crucial perspective that enriches climate justice theory. Disability justice challenges the perception of disability as solely a medical issue,

emphasizing societal barriers and prejudices that hinder inclusion and accessibility (McRuer, 2018). In the context of environmental and climate justice, disability justice underscores the importance of considering the needs and experiences of people with disabilities.

Intersectionality in Climate and Disability Justice

Disability justice intersects with climate justice, emphasizing the importance of inclusive and intersectional approaches to addressing social and environmental challenges. Climate policies and initiatives must be accessible and inclusive for people with disabilities, ensuring their meaningful participation and equitable access to resources (McRuer, 2018). While disability justice does not neatly fit into traditional categories, it contributes to the broader goals of climate justice by advocating for the inclusion and empowerment of marginalized communities. Considering the intersectionality of climate and disability justice, there is a compelling argument for incorporating disability justice theory into the framework of just climate sustainability, recognizing its vital role in achieving climate justice goals. It may seem paradoxical to place a de-emphasis on productivity at a time when efficiency and material benefits are frequently used to gauge success. However, when viewed from the perspective of disability justice, this seemingly outlandish strategy assumes new meaning. A culture that places a premium on work has historically disadvantaged people with disabilities. The climate justice activist interviews often included inspiring tales of disabled people who refuse to comply to an ableist system and fight for their right to exist by reading about their acts of resistance and resiliency.

Just Transition Theory

The Just Transition theory, as articulated by the Climate Justice Alliance, has 10 main principles. These unique principles do not overlap with other theories mentioned within the just climate sustainability frame. They emphasize the principles of Buen Vivir, meaningful work,

self-determination, and equitable redistribution of resources and power (Climate Justice Alliance, 2024). Moving Towards Buen Vivir: A cornerstone principle of Just Transition theory is the aspiration to move towards Buen Vivir, envisioning a world where all individuals, regardless of background, enjoy access to clean air, water, land, food, education, and shelter (Climate Justice Alliance, 2024). This principle underscores the intrinsic link between environmental sustainability and community well-being, emphasizing the prioritization of human rights and dignity in the transition to a sustainable future.

Creating Meaningful Work

Another crucial tenet of Just Transition theory is the creation of meaningful work that fosters human potential and offers opportunities for individuals to realize their full capacities and interests (Climate Justice Alliance, 2024). This principle emphasizes economic transformation that not only mitigates carbon emissions but also enhances the quality of life and livelihoods for all members of society.

Ensuring Self-Determination

Just Transition theory advocates for self determination, ensuring that all individuals can participate in decisions affecting their lives and communities (Climate Justice Alliance, 2024). This principle underscores the importance of democratic decision making processes that empower marginalized communities to shape their futures and determine pathways towards sustainability. Centre for Climate Change Research (2018),

Equitably Redistributing Resources and Power

At its core, Just Transition theory emphasizes the equitable redistribution of resources and power, challenging historical and systemic inequities rooted in race, class, gender, immigrant status, and other forms of oppression (Climate Justice Alliance, 2024). It aims to build new

systems that benefit all people and actively works to transform existing structures perpetuating social and environmental injustices. This principle seeks to reclaim capital and resources for the regeneration of communities and sectors of the economy most affected by these inequities. The Just Transition theory underscores the imperative of fostering a fair and equitable transition to a sustainable future, grounded in principles of environmental justice, human rights, and community empowerment. It provides a comprehensive framework for addressing the interconnected challenges of climate change, economic inequality, and social injustice. There are gaps in the literature for grassroots Just Transition, but notable writings include Bell Tyndall's Just Transitions: Pathways to Socially Inclusive Decarbonization examines the social dimensions of decarbonization efforts and proposes pathways for achieving socially inclusive transitions to a low-carbon economy and Just Transitions: Explorations of Sustainability in an Unfair World by Mark Swilling and Eve Annecke. This book offers insights into the practical implementation of Just Transition principles, exploring case studies and theoretical frameworks for equitably achieving sustainability.

The Just Transition paradigm framework identifies several crucial efforts as necessary parts of this transformative process. These include moving away from industrial food systems and toward food sovereignty, reversing the trend of gentrification and replacing it with community land rights, converting destructive development into ecosystem restoration, and reallocating funds from highways to strengthen public transit. Deep democracy, which gives communities and workers authority over choices that affect their day-to-day lives, is the fundamental tenet of the just transition.

Feminist (and Gender Non-conforming) Climate Justice Theory

Feminist perspectives underscore the intricate connections among social, economic, and environmental domains, shedding light on the disproportionate impacts of climate change on marginalized communities, particularly women. These perspectives advocate for gender-sensitive approaches to climate change mitigation and adaptation. Organizers and academics can employ feminist analysis to craft inclusive climate policies, programs, and initiatives that cater to the diverse needs and perspectives of gender identities. For instance, advocating for gender-responsive climate finance mechanisms prioritize women's participation and leadership in climate-related decision-making processes (Alston, 2019).

Feminist Economics

Feminist economics challenges mainstream economic paradigms by foregrounding the gendered division of labor, unequal resource distribution, and undervaluation of care work. This theoretical framework offers pathways toward alternative economic models that prioritize social and environmental well-being over profit and growth. Advocating for policies such as universal basic income, equitable access to essential services like healthcare and education, and the recognition and redistribution of unpaid care work align with feminist economic principles. By addressing economic disparities and advancing economic justice, feminist economics contributes to building a more sustainable and equitable society (Folbre, 2016).

Queer Ecology

Queer ecology explores the intersections of ecology, sexuality, and gender identity, challenging normative assumptions and binary distinctions in our understanding of nature and culture. This theoretical approach advocates for deconstructing heteronormative and anthropocentric narratives about the environment and promoting inclusive and diverse

perspectives. Recognizing the agency and subjectivity of non-human beings, acknowledging the influence of ecological contexts on human identities and experiences, and advocating for environmental policies that respect the diversity of life forms and relationships are central to queer ecology. Incorporating queer ecology into environmental discourse fosters more nuanced and inclusive understandings of ecological dynamics (Mortimer-Sandilands & Erickson, 2010).

Indigenous Climate Justice Theory

Indigenous, and decolonial theory, perspectives center on the rich tapestry of Indigenous peoples' traditional ecological knowledge and sustainable practices. These perspectives emphasize the paramount importance of respecting Indigenous sovereignty, land rights, and self determination in climate mitigation and adaptation efforts.

Indigenous Ways of Knowing

To advance Indigenous climate justice theory, organizers and academics must prioritize amplifying Indigenous voices and integrating Indigenous knowledge systems into climate policies and practices. This entails engaging in meaningful consultation and collaboration with Indigenous communities, acknowledging their inherent rights to land, resources, and cultural heritage, and actively supporting Indigenous-led initiatives for environmental stewardship and resilience-building (Tuck & Yang, 2014).

Anishinaabe World View

Initiatives rooted in the Anishinaabe World View in Detroit exemplify community resilience through traditional food cultivation and language revitalization (Gurneau, 2015). Decolonization Efforts: Efforts aimed at dismantling colonial structures and restoring Indigenous cultures are fundamental to building a stronger living culture and resisting gentrification (Adams and Daily, 2020; Bauwens and Kostakis, 2014). Building Community Vibrancy: Community

land trusts, cooperatives, and collective ownership models serve as potent tools in resisting gentrification and promoting community control over resources and land (Vo, 2016).

Regenerative Economic Theory

Donut Economics, theorized by economist Kate Raworth, offers a model that balances social and planetary boundaries to meet human needs without surpassing environmental limits. This model envisions a safe and equitable space for humanity, encompassing both a social foundation and an environmental ceiling. While numerous sustainability models integrate economic and ecological dimensions, they often overlook justice considerations. This gap underscores the importance of actively integrating grassroots perspectives into sustainable policies, extending beyond economics and ecosystems (Raworth, 2017).

Discussion

Systemic Challenges

Recognizing underlying race and class issues in sustainability efforts is pivotal for prioritizing a just transition towards greater sustainability (UNDP, 2019). Acknowledging past harms and displacements is essential for a just transition that addresses historical injustices (Adams and Daily, 2020). The just climate sustainability frame seeks to address these shortcomings by drawing inspiration from the Just Transition movement, Donut Economics, regenerative economics, and feminist economies. This framework prioritizes justice outcomes and recognizes the necessity of grassroots initiatives alongside policy interventions for genuine transformation.

By blending justice oriented thinking with established economic and ecological models, the just climate sustainability frame lays the groundwork for sustainable and equitable change (Raworth, 2017). This proposed framework aims to comprehensively capture the

multidimensional aspects of a Just Transition, ensuring alignment with environmental, climate, and social justice frameworks. A Just Transition framework prioritizes marginalized communities, promotes community-led initiatives, safeguards workers, fosters equity, and encourages stakeholder collaboration. Decision-makers must actively engage with grassroots innovation and cooperation to ensure sustainable development benefits everyone. By integrating these theoretical frameworks into practice, organizers and academics can contribute to building a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable future. This requires not only challenging harmful cultural narratives and dismantling binary thinking but also centering the voices and experiences of marginalized communities, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, and advocating for transformative change at local, national, and global level.

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