



## **Climate Change and Peace in Wales**

**Workshop Report from Academi Heddwch Cymru  
&  
Environment Platform Wales  
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**Academi  
Heddwch  
Cymru**

## Contents

About Academi Heddwch Cymru .....	3
About Environment Platform Wales .....	3
A. Background .....	4
B. Climate change, communities and peace in Wales .....	5
C. Key flashpoints in Wales .....	7
D. How might tensions be mitigated? .....	8
E. Improving our understanding of the effects of climate change on community tensions .....	9

### About Academi Heddwch Cymru

*Academi Heddwch Cymru* is Wales' national peace institute and is the first of its kind in the four nations of the United Kingdom. It belongs to a global family of peace institutes that bring together expertise to serve with the common aim of using peace-rooted approaches to global challenges.

*Academi Heddwch* aims to extend Wales' long-standing tradition of peace-making and peace-promotion by developing and coordinating an independent community of researchers in related fields. Funded by the Welsh Government but independent, *Academi Heddwch* works to place peace firmly on Wales's national agenda as well as on the international stage.

*Academi Heddwch's* aims are to ensure that:

- Wales makes an internationally recognised contribution to peace research and practice.
- A focus on peace is seen in relevant Welsh Government strategies and policies.
- There is strong public engagement with peace research and practice in Wales.

*Academi Heddwch* was established in 2020 and is an alliance of the 9 Universities in Wales, Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, the Learned Society of Wales, and the Welsh Centre for International Affairs (WCIA). It is also supported by representatives from the Peace Movement in Wales, Race Council Cymru, Urdd Gobaith Cymru, Rotary International, and the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales.

### About Environment Platform Wales

*Environment Platform Wales* (EPW) was established in 2018 and comprises of a partnership of ten research organisations (eight Welsh based universities, JNCC and the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (UK CEH)) as well as the two leading Welsh environmental policy organisations, Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and Welsh Government (WG). The partners contribute financial resources to EPW under a three-year Memorandum of Agreement.

EPW's aims are

- to bridge the gap between environmental research and policy, achieved through the facilitation of collaborations with government officials, academics and post-graduate students.
- to promote the development of new research projects and the sharing of research outcomes with the wider public in Wales and beyond.
- To support students across Wales in considering their career choices after university, providing guidance on their options and giving them a competitive edge over students elsewhere.

## A. Background

Climate change is a pressing emergency which affects us all and will continue to affect generations to come. Many of the consequences of the climate emergency will be social in nature. Some of these are already being seen, including changing industrial practices and impacts of extreme weather events on our communities, while others are looming. The concern of this Report is that many of these consequences create a risk to peace.

Peace is not simply the absence of war – though climate change may increase the risk of major conflict either directly over diminishing resources (e.g. over water) or indirectly (e.g. through climate-induced migration). Climate change also exacerbates the effects of conflict, creating further risks to those amongst the most vulnerable of global society.<sup>1</sup> But it is also about:

- societies living without fear,
- building social resilience alongside individual rights,
- promoting social justice, fairness, respect and equality to create communities ‘at peace’ with themselves.

This perspective on peace – what is called ‘*positive peace*’ – is usually considered to be a strength of Wales. Take for example contemporary Welsh Government policies such as the *Well-being of Future Generations Act* and the commitment to being an anti-racist nation.<sup>2</sup> The perceptions of large parts of Wales as a ‘rural idyll’ and the fact that Wales is often identified as promoting peace, are broadly understood. However, climate change will create – and to an extent is already creating - risks in Wales. In particular, climate change has the potential to create tensions within and between communities in Wales – from the effects of climate mitigation strategies, to increased tourism - significantly affecting community cohesion, wellbeing and the attitudes which contribute to a peaceful society.

This Report identifies some of these risks and possible mitigations and is intended to inform public debate and policy. Its audience is policy makers in both national government and local authorities, those organisations and agencies which are concerned with climate change, and the people of Wales, who will be affected by climate change both directly and through policies to mitigate or adapt to climate change. It is a debate which has barely begun, even though some of the risks are becoming increasingly clear. The Report is based on a series of meetings and is intended to reflect the ideas generated in those meetings rather than provide a consistent blueprint for the future. It is therefore intended to help energise this debate, rather than end it; it is not intended to be comprehensive, but indicative; and the solutions are often couched in terms of needing to better understand the

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<sup>1</sup> This link is made, for example by [COP28 Declaration On Climate, Relief, Recovery And Peace](#):’

Acknowledging that fragility and conflict increase people’s vulnerability and exposure to climate hazards and impede coping capacity and adaptation options, and that, at the same time, climate change adversely affects lives, livelihoods, infrastructure, water, human capital, food, health, cultural identity, education, and human settlements, among other spheres, exacerbating humanitarian needs and constituting a significant and growing challenge to stability,’

<sup>2</sup> [Anti-racist Wales Action Plan | GOV.WALES](#)



complex interactions between science and society, between rights and responsibilities, and between change and continuity.

The Report is the product of a series of online meetings, an in-person workshop and an online seminar as part of EPW's 'Insights' series. These were jointly organised by Academi Heddwch Cymru (Wales' Peace Institute) and Environment Platform Wales (EPW). Participants were key researchers from Welsh Universities and members of EPW. The in-person workshop was hosted by the Dialogue Centre at Aberystwyth University, facilitated by its Principal Lead Dr Jennifer Wolowicz. Academi Heddwch Cymru and EPW are grateful for the time colleagues spent with us on this; responsibility for the Report and its contents are shared by Academi Heddwch and EPW alone.

## B. Climate change, communities and peace in Wales

The focus of this Report is on how changes caused by anthropogenic climate change are likely to create tensions within communities. Tensions are created not only by climate change directly, but also by climate mitigation and adaptation strategies which can generate community-level stress.

Worryingly, at the local level there already appears to be a growing polarisation of, and between, communities within Wales. There is also growing evidence of a sense of disassociation by individuals and communities in Wales, including in terms of representation and empowerment. Anecdotal evidence suggests that people in Wales also appear to feel increasingly removed from their environment and there is a lack of engagement with the natural world. Llewellyn et al (2017) reported that those highly connected with their landscapes, better understand their value, take part in outdoor activities and develop economic opportunities. Conversely, a lack of connection is evidenced by a lack of identification leading, in extreme cases, to destructive behaviour, such as fly-tipping and countryside arson, the effects of the latter being exacerbated by climate change, such negative activities can clearly lead to conflict at a local level. These factors create underlying tensions which climate change, including adaptation and mitigation policies, may exacerbate.

Although the Welsh Government's ability to act on climate change is limited by the powers reserved by the Westminster Government (including most revenue-raising powers), and to a lesser extent by international agreements, it does have authority over some areas relating to climate change and has already introduced a number of national mitigation and adaptation policies including the Just Transition Framework currently under development. Moreover, key legislation such as the Well-being of Future Generations Act and its associated 7 Well-being Goals are clearly linked to the effects of climate change.

Addressing climate change and its effects however is not simply a matter for national governments - whether in Cardiff or London. Rather, local authorities have an important role to play, as does civil society in Wales. This includes a role in maintaining social cohesion and community relations when they are under pressure from climate change or mitigation and adaptation policies. Maintaining positive peace in Wales in the face of climate change

therefore requires a whole society approach, though leadership by Welsh Government is vital.

In our discussions, we used 6 broad categories to help identify the causes of tensions which currently exist in society in Wales and which provide the context for how climate change may create a risk for peace:

<i>Categories</i>	<i>Causes of tension</i>
<i>Political</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher degrees of intolerance together with a lack of respect for other opinions leading to increased polarisation.</li> <li>• A lack of trust in authority including government – feelings of being let down and disenfranchisement, particularly prevalent amongst youth.</li> <li>• Disconnection from representative politics.</li> <li>• The role of social media in political discourse, fuelling anger and fear.</li> <li>• A breakdown in separation of powers between politics and judiciary.</li> <li>• Debate is conducted within echo-chambers and the space for dialogue and compromise is diminished.</li> </ul>
<i>Economic</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impact of the cost-of-living crisis.</li> <li>• Heightened expectations of personal wealth by individuals.</li> <li>• Net Zero policies leading to changes in industry and economy.</li> <li>• Increased economic disparity.</li> <li>• Difficulties for young people in accessing the housing market.</li> <li>• Changing patterns of tourism.</li> </ul>
<i>Social</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced social cohesion.</li> <li>• Fragmented information sources and poor media literacy.</li> <li>• Inaction over low-level anti-social behaviour.</li> <li>• Demographic change and inter-generational differences in viewpoints.</li> <li>• ‘Race to consume’ – high levels of consumption no longer an indicator of success and status but an expectation.</li> </ul>
<i>Technological</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The sense that technological change is accelerating with little control over its use and impact.</li> <li>• The uncertain impact of artificial intelligence across multiple dimensions.</li> <li>• The social pressure for early adoption of next-gen technologies.</li> <li>• Increasing prospect of synthetic biology changing what it means to be human.</li> </ul>
<i>Legal</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Established legal systems appear unable to meet the pace of social and technological change (e.g. over the use of social media, and the adoption of AI).</li> <li>• Evident difficulties in framing issues to enable society to accept new legislation which changes established practices – e.g. 20mph speed limit.</li> </ul>

<i>Ethical</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there a 'right to place' or should some communities be left to die?</li> <li>• Is the idea of a 'moral compass' dated?</li> <li>• The increased sensitivities to animal rights, evidenced by the growth of vegetarianism and veganism leading to plant-based foods.</li> <li>• The growth in climate conscious markets including carbon-offsetting lifestyle choices (e.g. increased numbers of electric cars, concerns over long-haul holidays).</li> </ul>
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### C. Key flashpoints in Wales

Our discussions highlighted issues where climate change may create, and in some cases is already creating, tensions for communities and society in Wales. The most significant of these are:

- *Coastal change*, where rising sea levels will create a significant risk of coastal flooding and the viability of some settlements and farmland, while marine environments will be at risk from higher temperatures and biodiversity loss, affecting fishing and other maritime industries.
- *The consequences of mitigating strategies*, which include controversies over the development of green energy solutions (for example over new onshore windfarms and the erection of pylons to take electricity from offshore windfarms), and the disruption to industry and lifestyle from carbon reduction strategies.
- *Disruptive weather events*, where increasingly common extremes of weather will impact on land use (including farming and housing), infrastructure (e.g. transport), and the delivery of already stretched public services (including health services).
- *Everyday living*, where a wide range of changes will prove disruptive to employment and lifestyle. These range from:
  - climate-induced migration and new patterns of tourism placing strains on local infrastructure and services,
  - the development of new infrastructure such as reservoirs resulting in changes in land use and landscape,
  - new restrictions on goods and services such as waste disposal
  - greater restriction of new developments due to increased flooding and coastal erosion risk.
- *Freshwater stress*, where increases in heavy rainfall risks flooding housing and farmland whilst conversely, drought conditions lead to catastrophic impacts on biodiversity. In addition, water quality impacts will be exacerbated not helped and where dated drainage and sewerage infrastructure may need costly upgrading.

We also identified particular geographic areas of concern, where climate change might create tensions within communities. The most at risk are (in no particular order):

- a. Neath/Port Talbot, where the closure of the Tata steelworks is related to climate change both directly and indirectly.

- b. The North-West and mid-Wales coastline, where large stretches are vulnerable to coastal flooding. Areas of particular concern given the combination of population size and vulnerability to flooding are around Rhyl, Towyn and Fairbourne.
- c. The South-East population centre of Cardiff and Newport, where the risk of flooding due to sea level rise is amongst the highest in the UK with over 30,000 properties at increased risk.
- d. The Cambrian uplands, where extreme weather and climate-induced soil degradation pose a heightened risk to farming.
- e. The National Parks and other tourist hotspots, where changing patterns of travel to reduce carbon footprints are already creating significant pressure on local communities.
- f. The South Wales valleys, where communities lack the economic means to adapt to change required by climate mitigation strategies.

#### D. How might tensions be mitigated?

The relationship between climate change and society is complex. Some changes may benefit certain communities but harm others, for example increased tourism will bring economic benefits to some but is already creating local tensions. It is also clear that policies designed to mitigate or adapt to the effects of climate change and therefore to protect society, can nevertheless have a negative impact upon some communities.

There is therefore a need not only to understand the potential impact of climate change and associated policies on society in Wales, but also how this might create or exacerbate tensions within and between communities, and crucially what strategies might be developed to mitigate these challenges.

We identified three broad strategies in our discussions.

*The first* concerned how society viewed the policies to adapt to, or mitigate the effects of, climate change. These policies are currently seen by society – and indeed sometimes presented by decision makers – as challenging. Changing this narrative from a challenge to an opportunity would help to reduce tension. Part of this would be to engage in dialogue over new rights and responsibilities in an era of climate change. This dialogue would need to be national, but should also be regional and local; and it would need to involve communities and civil society as well as government. It would require the identification of both key opinion formers and community leaders, and also the means to engage with a broad range of people and communities especially given the polarisation and alienation identified above. The aim of this would be to create a shared understanding of how Wales will adapt to a new, changed climate. The Welsh Government has already made a positive start with consultation over its Just Transition Framework<sup>3</sup> but this needs to be an ongoing process to create a free and open dialogue.

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<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.gov.wales/just-transition-framework>



*The second* strategy was to identify the means to incentivise people and communities to change, rather than relying on enforcement mechanisms or waiting for a crisis to provide a permissive environment. Some of these incentives might be material, for example in the form of grants. But others might be in the form of reframing social and economic change as a positive and within our control, rather than seeing it as an unfortunate consequence of factors outside of our control. An important aspect of this is the attachment felt by many in Wales both to the natural environment and to their local communities which can provide the basis for a reframing of the issues.

*The third* strategy was to reduce the financial impact on communities as *an integral part* of policies to adapt or mitigate the effects of climate change. The changes which will be necessary to adapt to or mitigate the effects of climate change are likely to be financially costly, not only for government but for individuals and communities in Wales. People already living in deprived communities are particularly vulnerable to the disruptive effects of these policies, but other communities might be placed under financial pressure because of policies which might nevertheless be beneficial to society more generally. This has the clear potential to cause tension within and between communities, but taking a proactive view and incorporating support as part of these policies would help to minimise such effects. We note the emphasis on ‘fairness’ in the Welsh Government’s proposals for a Just Transition Framework but implementing this will not necessarily be straightforward.

## E. Improving our understanding of the effects of climate change on community tensions

The debate over how climate change will affect society in Wales is still at an early stage, although the effects are already being seen in some areas. We therefore identified four priority projects to help not only to understand the issues involved but prompt a debate to find a way forward which reduces the risk of tensions and promote a peaceful society in Wales:

- a. *Creating a shared vision for adapting to a new climate.* This project would explore how to change the narratives on climate change around both mitigation and adaptation and from challenge to opportunity. It would also explore how to create a meaningful dialogue in and between communities, involving both government and civil society, and especially engaging those groups who feel alienated from political processes more generally.
- b. *Improving water absorption.* Water is now running off the land much more quickly because of the changed absorbency of surfaces in both rural and especially urban settings, from individuals paving their driveways to planning permission for new builds. This creates a heightened risk of flooding, a risk to water quality, and to the viability of some agricultural land. Runoff is also increased due to the higher intensity of extreme precipitation events, caused by climate change<sup>4</sup>. We need to better

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<sup>4</sup> [Effects of extreme precipitation intensity and duration on the runoff and nutrient yields - ScienceDirect](#)

understand both the technical and social means of ensuring water is absorbed into the land, and how to monitor and transmit information about water quality, ground absorbency and flood risk.

- c. *Community-led adaptation to coastal change.* This project would identify communities at risk and link them with communities facing similar problems, in Wales and globally, to share best practice. Key to this would be the establishment of community-led initiatives which would map people's interests and concerns – what communities see as the problems and vulnerabilities they face, how they might successfully adapt and what opportunities might exist. Integral to this is the idea of a community voice but also engagement with different stakeholders within communities as well as external agencies who might have a role to play.
- d. *Changing our life: the 'Future Generations' model.* This project begins with the understanding that climate change requires more than technical solutions to mitigate its effects. It also requires society to adapt and communities to change. Wales has a precedent in developing a broad-based approach to social challenges with the *Well-being of Future Generations Act* and the Future Generations Commissioner. To what extent could this model be used as the basis for action in Wales on climate change? Could the Future Generations Commissioner lead on these issues, or would a new Act and Commissioner provide the leadership to develop the consensus needed for social change?

