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Climate Change Study Group Celebrates First Anniversary with ‘unique book launch’

Over 50 social scientists gathered to fill the Bronte Room at the British Library last week for the BSA Climate Change study group’s ‘Social Dimensions of Climate Change – A unique book launch and discussion event’.

Chaired by Dr Chris Shaw of the Science, Technology and Policy Research Unit at the University of Sussex, the panel included Professor Gordon Walker of the Lancaster Environment Centre, whose forthcoming book is entitled *Environmental Justice: Concepts, Evidence and Politics*. The book examines the diversity of ways in which environment and social difference are intertwined. The second speaker was Distinguished Professor of Sociology at Lancaster University, John Urry, who has recently published the provocative and wide-ranging manifesto for sociological engagement with climate change, *Climate Change and Society*. Professor Mike Hulme, of the School of Environmental Sciences at the University of East Anglia completed the panel to discuss his 2009 release *Why we disagree about climate change*. That three major new books examining the social relations of climate and environmental politics have been published in such close succession is testament to the ongoing attention social scientists are paying to climate change.

The launch was setup as a series of three author presentations based on chapters which had been circulated to attendees in advance of the event, followed by a discussion. Professor Walker opened the session by providing an outline summary of a chapter in his book entitled ‘Climate justice: Scaling the politics of the future’. As the title suggests, the work is concerned with the geographies of different forms of justice in relation to climate change. Professor Walker pointed out that there is no one universal climate justice and he discussed this point with reference to Erik Swyngedouw’s deployment of the notion of the post-political (the idea that a damaging pro-market consensus serves to constrain possible political and ethical responses to climate change). This point was again picked up by Professor Mike Hulme whose book attempts to open up spaces for disagreement around the various meanings of climate change. Meanwhile, Professor John Urry’s presentation served to highlight the role that sociology, as opposed to economics, might have in exploring the social habits and customs surrounding the energy and climate change crises.

Following the presentations Dr Shaw invited the audience to raise points and ask questions from the floor. A thoughtful discussion followed in which questions were asked about: the dangers of authoritarian responses to climate change; whether, and how, to square the rights of individuals with necessity for legislative action on climate change; and how to engage different communities, such as small businesses, in

appropriate responses. The discussions revealed the immense scale and urgency of the issues involved and, in the process, highlighted the critical necessity for sociological contributions. Discounted copies of the books were available on the night from the publishers who also contributed towards a drinks reception, which followed the discussion.

Since launching a year ago the study group has been involved in various events. There are more events on the horizon, including 'Methodological and conceptual approaches for researching climate change at different societal scales' taking place on the 30th-31st March at the University of Southampton, and a planned camping trip and roundtable at the Centre for Alternative Technology ('Energy Futures for a Zero Carbon Britain'). The study group will also be co-convening stream on Risk and Climate Change at the BSA annual conference in April. Visit the study groups webpage for information on all past and future events: <http://www.britsoc.co.uk/specialisms/climate.htm>

(Written by Leon Sealey-Huggins on behalf of the Climate Change Study Group)