

**Just climate urbansims:  
Aligning U.S. municipal policy with national movements for climate justice**

A thesis

Submitted by

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## **Abstract**

Municipal climate action has the potential to be a catalytic force for socially just and resilient communities. Municipal leaders are at a critical inflection point. ‘Just climate urbanisms’ offer a pathway for cities, towns, and villages that will enable us to survive *and* thrive. Utilizing Black feminist methodologies, this thesis draws on an interdisciplinary set of theoretical frameworks and disciplines including climate science, urban geography, emergent strategy, and social justice to examine the policy implications of national climate justice movements for U.S. municipal praxis. This research was designed to seed municipal decision maker strategies that support effective leadership for a just, resilient, and sustainable future. Key findings from this thesis include that climate justice organizations are asking for deep democratic participation in a just transition away from extractive economies. The data is also clear that municipal governments have a critically important role to play in shaping just climate policies.

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## **Glossary**

***Abolition***: The process of building life affirming institutions (Gilmore, 2007).

***Abolitionist democracy***: A theoretical ambition for a racially just nation that to be achieved would require new practices, institutions, and cultural paradigms to enable the economic, political, and social freedom for Black people (Du Bois, 1935).

***Climate change***: Changes in temperatures and weather patterns. In this paper, climate change refers to human caused climate change burning fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas. <sup>1</sup>

***Climate justice***: Centering the people affected by climate change in the development and outcomes of climate actions.

***Climate Justice Alliance (CJA)***: A preeminent U.S. based organization, the Climate Justice Alliance, was formed to make collective impact across national and regional grassroots organizations to ensure there was a “just transition” away from fossil-fuel.

***Climate justice movement***: Social and political mobilization around climate justice principles and strategies.

***Climate urbanism***: Urbanism in a climate changed world.

***Critical urban theory***: “Critical urban theory emphasizes the politically and ideologically mediated, socially contested and therefore malleable character of urban space - that is, it’s continual (re)construction as a site, medium and outcome of historically specific relationships and social power” (Brenner, 2009).

***Deep democracy***: governing that enable tangible power and ownership over decisions

Physical infrastructure: the build environment. Tangible objects and elements

Social infrastructure: Human network and institutions that support social connectivity.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations (n.d.) Climate Action. Retrieved on April 1, 2023 from <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/what-is-climate-change>

***Emergent child nodes:*** Categories of qualitative data in this research defined in chapter 3 as *key sub categories or essential layers within the parent nodes that were not identified in the design of the research instrument laid out in this chapter.*

***Emergent parent nodes:*** Categories of qualitative data in this research defined in chapter 3 as *what local governments have the power to do and thus the fault lines of their unique role in the ecosystem of the climate justice movement that falls outside of the predetermined parent nodes.*

***Environmental justice:*** Equitable distribution of benefits and burdens of environmental hazards and laws, policies, and regulations.

***Equity:*** Accounting for a full and complex web of present and historical realities in distributions of burdens and benefits.

***Frontline community:*** Frontline communities are groups of people who are directly affected by climate change and inequality in society at higher rates than people who have more power in society.

***Just climate urbanisms:*** Climate justice at the urban scale.

***Just transition:*** Evolving the economy to address climate change and environmental destruction in a way that centers social justice in the process and outcomes.

***Local power:*** The Tenth Amendment of the Constitution of the United States reserves authority-giving powers to the states who then can allocate certain authority to local governments<sup>2</sup>.

***Marxism:*** Economic and political theory developed by Karl Marx that offer a critical of capitalism<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> National League of Cities. 2016. Cities 101 - Delegation of Power in Cities. <https://www.nlc.org/resource/cities-101-delegation-of-power/>

<sup>3</sup> Britannica (n.d.). Marxism. Retrieved April 8, 2023, from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Marxism>

***Municipal policy***: Ordinances, resolutions, administrative regulations, departmental policy, or any other official expression municipal procedures, policies, or practices<sup>4</sup>.

***Municipal Government Power Nodes***: Opportunities of municipal government to influence change within the legal boundaries of U.S. law.

***Regenerative Economy***: A shared vision of the future where extractive practices are no longer needed to sustain lives and livelihoods. This includes solidary practices (economies), communal values, and ecological principles of regeneration.

***Space***: The idea that places are composed of layers that go beyond the visible and tangible to include power.

***Urbanism***: The theoretical and practical processes of socially and tangibly shaping cities.

***Urban geography***: A subset of human geography that explores urban space.

***Urban planning***: Designing and implementing cities, towns, and villages to meet a community's basic needs and support excellent lives.

***National Climate Justice Alliance***: The members of CJA who have a national (versus regional or local) scope<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Law Insider. (n.d.) City Policy Definition. Retrieved April 8, 2023, from <https://www.lawinsider.com/dictionary/city-policy>

<sup>5</sup> Climate Justice Alliance. (n.d.) Out Members. Retrieved April 8, 2023, from <https://climatejusticealliance.org/members-of-the-alliance/>

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Regardless of how proactive municipal decision makers are about addressing climate impacts on their jurisdiction, climate change has shaped, is shaping, and will continue to shape urban futures. Either through disaster response and recovery or through climate planning, policy, and infrastructure. Whether in response or resilience, municipal leaders are constantly making choices along a spectrum between addressing climate change within status quo frameworks of neoliberal and capital cities or leveraging the *opportunity* that climate policy presents to catalyze socially just and transformative futures for cities, towns, and villages.

This research is designed to contribute to the thinking on how transformative climate policy at the municipal scale can be informed by frontline communities. The methodology aligns what Córdova et al calls “climate justice planning” wherein cities center the voices and perspectives of workers and communities when developing climate action plans (Córdova et al., 2022). This project is designed to answer two questions. One, *what are climate justice organizations asking of cities, towns, and villages?* And two, *how can these demands inform or be seeded in municipal climate policy?* These questions respond to calls for a research agenda focused on transformative climate action by focusing on justice and the “inequalities that both produce climate change and profoundly shape responses to it” (Newell et al., 2021).

In 2022, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) confirmed with high scientific confidence and consensus that human-caused climate change is currently causing significant loss and damage around the world. The authors of the report found that human-caused climate change, including more extreme weather events, has already caused significant impacts to people and the earth (United Nations, 2022).

This panel of scientists also agreed that we are on a collective path for these impacts to multiply. “Global warming, reaching 1.5°C in the near-term, would cause unavoidable increases in multiple climate hazards and present multiple risks to ecosystems and humans (very high confidence)” (United Nations, 2022, p. 1). They go on to say that “beyond 2040 and depending on the level of global warming, climate change will lead to numerous risks to natural and human systems (high confidence). For 127 identified key risks, assessed mid and long- term impacts are up to multiple times higher than currently observed (high confidence)” (United Nations, 2022, p. 1). In sum, we are on the brink of unavoidable risks that will harm people and the planet.

Here is the good news: “the magnitude and rate of climate change and associated risks depend strongly on near-term mitigation and adaptation actions, and projected adverse impacts and related losses and damages escalate with every increment of global warming (very high confidence)” (United Nations, 2022, p. 1). In other words, every little thing we do now to address climate change matters. A lot.

The world's leading climate scientists not only agree about the current and future impacts of climate change, but they recognized with “high confidence” that “across sectors and regions the most vulnerable people and systems are observed to be disproportionately affected” (United Nations, 2022, p. 1). Who is vulnerable is ultimately about who and what has been, is currently, and will be valued. And value is socially constructed. In *The Cultural Nature of Risk: Can There Be an Anthropology of Uncertainty?*, Åsa Bolham uses a definition of risk as a scenario or event where something that matters to people is in danger or uncertain. Bolham goes on to conclude that “to categorize something as a “risk” implies value” (Bolhom, Å 2003, p.161). As such, it is impossible to decouple climate risk from culture paradigms about who and what matters.

Climate risk and vulnerability in the United States is inextricably linked with what is culturally and socially valued in our body politic. The government in the United States has a long and deeply racialized history (Hardy et al., 2017). From the founding of the United States, and reflected in the constitution on which the entire national legal system is built, the U.S. has devalued the lives of Black and brown people (*The Constitution of the United States*, 1787). This systematic, intentional, and inequitable history of governance in the United States has allowed for the marginalization, death, and poisoning of Black and brown bodies through centuries of racist policies and practices in the name of progress, democracy, and freedom.

Scholars have described that the legacies of racism continue to be reinforced through government policy unless significant effort is made to *intentionally* counteract racism and related facets of this uneven legal, political and economic landscape (Gooden, 2017). Due to these systemic and cultural challenges in the United States, Black and brown people are impacted first and worst by climate change. For example, climate hazards such as increased flooding, drought, more frequent and severe storms, extreme heat, and so on disproportionately affect people living across the U.S. who are also more likely to be impacted, displaced, and killed from climate change due to racist practices such as redlining (Meerow et al., 2019).

Climate change impacts and solutions can both cause injustice and reinforce existing injustice. However, this thesis will argue that climate action can also be a catalytic force for a better world. Climate action that thoughtfully catalyzes just futures will require all of us, regardless of our place or position in society. When talking with Krista Tippett in March 2023 Isabel Wilkerson said: “Ask what can I do in the world that I’m in, with the power and influence I have? Each system requires repair, if not total overhaul. Whatever system we are part of, that’s where we can roll up our sleeves and get to work in fixing that system” (Tippit, 2023).

Municipalities are one critical scale at which to make sense of and address climate change. “While climate change is a global problem, its effects are – and increasingly will be – felt locally in communities across the U.S. and the globe. Just as national and state-level action on climate change is required, local governments also have a critical role to play” (DeBacker et al, 2015, p.1). Cities are the largest contributors to climate change with cities using approximately 78% of the world’s energy and producing approximately 60% of greenhouse gas emission while accounting for less than 5% of the earth’s surface (United Nations, n.d.). In *Pathways to Resilience: Transforming Cities in a Changing Climate*, the Movement Strategy Center states:

Cities play a pivotal role in this new reality. They are now home to a majority of the world’s people, and they are central to economies around the globe. Of course, no city is an island — each is connected, through trade and ecosystems, to larger regions and the world. But, given their cultural and economic importance, cities can take the lead on responding to climate change. They can reduce greenhouse gas emissions by making a swift, large-scale transition from carbon-intensive economic activity to low-carbon and carbon-free models. Cities can also adapt to the impacts of a changing climate even as they try to mitigate these impacts — by strengthening social ties and deepening the practice of democracy necessary for such a large-scale shift (DeBacker, 2015, p.2 ).

U.S. cities, towns and villages are the focus of this research. Cities are densely packed with players, each of whom can play an important role in addressing the climate crisis at the scale of the urban. However, this project focuses specifically on the role of municipal governments in addressing climate change. For the purposes of this research, municipal governments focus on policy decision makers, from elected officials to municipal staff.

The specific focus of this research on municipal government decision makers stems from the unique power of cities:

Municipalities control critical land use decisions that affect the design and function of communities, including decisions pertaining to allowable industrial and commercial uses, zoning related to location of residential areas in relationship to sources of pollution and hazards, and engagement of low-income and residents of color in critical decision-making that may affect environmental burden, socio-economic status and health (Brown, n.d.).

There is a core assumption in the design of this research instrument that the state, specifically municipal government, do indeed have a role to play in dismantling status quo systems that are harmful and building transformed futures. Fung and Wright discuss the role of the state and claim that an activist state can counteract the negative effects of capitalism (Fung, 2003). This notion of an activist state, and specifically municipal government is fundamental to this research.

In her essay, *Public Service for Public Health*, Gina McCarthy claims “it's time for folks like me, who look at the public process as the cornerstone of our democracy, to step up. It is time to stop focusing on what the government *can* do and start recognizing the critical role we all play in *making* the government do its job. Here's my plan: I'm going to communicate the stakes of this crisis and the opportunities that await if we get it right” (Johnson, et al, 2021, p.224). City officials, elected and staff, have a critically important role to play in both addressing the climate crisis and doing so within a framework of social justice.

The thesis can contribute to the scholarly thinking on how municipal governments can center justice in climate action by centering the voices, needs and concerns of frontline communities. In, *Towards a postcolonial perspective on climate urbanism*, Robin and Broto claim that “alongside a critical perspective on the operation of power and capital, climate urbanism research must attend to below-the radar forms of action and explore their transformative potential and capacity to improve living conditions for the urban majority under

climate change” (Robin & Broto, 2021, p. 873). They go on to say that “the literature on climate urbanism does not yet reflect the diversity of urban responses emerging under the broad umbrella of urban climate action” (Robin & Broto, 2021, p. 869).

Status quo climate urbanism refers to a neoliberal urban environment of capital accumulation in a climate changed city. Climate and environmental hazards disproportionately impact low-income and minority communities and these communities receive disproportionately fewer resources from the state during disaster recovery. Despite the body of evidence, the current urban climate and resilience agenda fails to adequately address social equity issues (Meerow et al., 2019). Unlike this neoliberal climate urbanism, just climate urbanism explicitly recognizes present day oppression and challenges injustice through acts of abolition (Long & Rice, 2021). This thesis will ultimately argue that making just climate urbanisms a reality requires transition to a regenerative and localized economy to “stimulate new and sustainable forms of community-led economic activity that promotes regional and global ecological balance” (DeBacker et al, 2015, p. 12).

To develop a transformative pathway towards urban climate action, we must contend with the underlying paradigm that enables capitalism by falsely separating nature from culture (Long & Rice, 2021). If we continue to see ourselves as separate from nature, allowing for its continued degradation and destruction, we will increase our own human vulnerability. The IPCC report captured this need to reconnect people to place and land by sharing the high degree of scientific confidence that “human and ecosystem vulnerability are interdependent” (United Nations, 2022, p. 1).

Linda Shi and Susanne Moser state that transformative adaptation, as a subset of transformative climate action more broadly, “may include changing economic paradigms and

development patterns away from those predicated on the exploitation of nature without limits; redressing systemic racism imperialism and misogyny; decolonizing of knowledge systems; reforming governance institutions that operationalize those developmental logistics; and reckoning with underlying worldviews and values that legitimize dominance and exceptionalism” (Shi & Moser, 2021, p.372). This definition of the transformative path to urban climate actions highlights the reality that "underlying our project is a fundamental reframe" which relates to how we make sense of the environment, the economy, and each other (DeBacker et al, 2015, p.43). Through taking climate action, we must somehow remember that we belong to each other and the earth.

Chapter 2 describes how this thesis fills a gap and builds on the current research on the role of municipal governments in addressing how climate injustice can be addressed by choosing transformative paths forward.

Over recent years, the focus on adaptation and resilience thinking has increasingly moved away from a focus on incremental change, that is, adapting to climate impacts within existing governance structures, to a more transformative approach which considers how deeper social, economic and political structures create and reinforce vulnerability and hence are part of the problem (Newell et al., 2021)

Scholars like Newell et al have pointed out that while there are an increasing number of calls for more transformative approaches to climate action, research and scholarship on *how* this can be achieved remains limited. This thesis is responding to those calls for scholarship, and therefore aims to provide more practical recommendations for municipalities as an outcome.

To answer the research questions, chapter 3 presents a methodology to explore how municipalities can seed justice in climate action, I turned to a collective of frontline groups

calling for climate action: The National Climate Justice Alliance (CJA)<sup>6</sup>. This thesis unpacks the publicly available resources and documents of national climate justice organizations and explores how this information could be used to direct municipal climate policies that support the development of more low-carbon, resilient, and just communities. An overview and summary of the existing documentation on the topic of U.S. local climate policy from national frontline perspectives is produced as a result of this analysis. The purpose of this research is to gain insights into what climate justice organizations have already said about the future they want to build. This thesis is an exploration of how municipal governments could operate in alignment with the vision of CJA by asking *what climate justice organizations are asking of municipalities* and *how can these requests be seeded at the municipal scale?* Chapters 4, 5, 6 explore the findings and present pathways forward for municipalities leaders.

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<sup>6</sup> [National Climate Justice Alliance](#)

## **Chapter 2: Theoretical Frameworks**

The theoretical and academic literature relevant to this thesis with a broad scope is extensive, and cannot be fully explored within the scope of this project, but I will focus on core nodes of theory to ground this work. Local government law, urban geography, climate urbanism, abolition, climate justice, and systems theory are the primary frameworks necessary to support the research process. While distinct from one another, these literatures build on each other to develop a foundation on which to explore the role of municipal climate policy to support socially just and climate resilient futures.

### **2.1 Local Government Law: Constraints and Rights**

Local government law provides a lens with which to explore theories of urbanism and social justice. In other words, this initial literature is the container that will be placed around potential policy solutions based on the unique role and power of municipalities in the United States. The entire premise of this thesis rests on the assumption that municipal governments have a role to play in addressing climate justice. The purpose of this section is to clarify the legal constraints that every city, town and village has when taking any kind of policy action. Legally, local governments, including municipalities are subject to state governments and only have as much power as is delegated by the state (Briffault, 1990). Given this legal structure, the technical power of municipalities varies by state.

There are two overarching principles of local government authority applied by States. Dillon's Rule and Home Rule. States that use the legal principle Dillon's Rule take a narrower approach to local authority which means that they only have power explicitly granted by the state. Home rule states on the other hand give greater autonomy to local governments and limit the state interference in local affairs. Some states apply both Dillon's rule and home rule meaning

that different local governments in that state are granted different powers. Essentially, every local government and municipality will vary significantly in terms of legal power granted by state (National League of Cities, 2016.).

Municipal governments also vary wildly depending on the contents of their municipal charter. Each municipality has a charter which outlines how the municipality is organized, what powers various actors within the government have, essential procedures within the municipality, and the form of government. There are five basic forms of government in cities in the U.S.: council-manager, mayor-council, commission, town meeting and representative town meeting. Each of these forms of government vary significantly in regards to who has power within the public. For example, strong mayor systems are most accountable to the public because they must be elected whereas cities led by a staff City Manager who does not need to seek reelection and thus has less democratic accountability (National League of Cities, 2016.).

These legal nuances mean that the findings of thesis research must be adapted in each municipality's local context. However, there are functional powers that municipalities typically exercise. These generalized powers and responsibilities include land use planning, local governance, fiscal, and the maintenance of infrastructure. Given the relatively limited concrete legal power of municipalities, advocacy to other levels of government may be necessary to enact certain policies, access funding, or prevent preemption. This type of vertical policy coordination is essential to support effective policy outcomes (Vargas et al., 2019).

## **2.2 Space**

Ideas of municipalities and urbanisms have underlying ideas of space. These ideas can either be explicit or implicit. I am choosing to make ideas of space explicit because it offers a way to understand inequalities and unsustainability in urban contexts. In *Social Justice and the*

*City*, human and urban geographer David Harvey writes that “theories, like definitions, have their roots in metaphysical speculation and in ideology” (Harvey, 1973, p. 195). He goes on to claim that the objectives of the researcher are embedded in the theoretical frameworks utilized to conduct research and interrogate findings. Notions of space and thus urbanism are complex and inherently interdisciplinary. Thus, the bedrock philosophy of space utilized for this research must be clearly articulated. To the question “what is space?” Harvey’s definition of relational space aligns with the perspectives outlined in this research (Harvey, 1973). Notions of space as the bedrock of subsequent interrogation of climate urbanism center the belief that there is a strong relationship between social and political processes and objects that space possesses.

Henri Lefebvre writes in “the Production of Space” that “social space is produced and reproduced in connection with the forces of production” (Lefebvre, 1974), p. 77). He goes on that “social space contains a great diversity of objects, both natural and social, including the networks and pathways which facilitate the exchange of material things and information” (Lefebvre, 1974), p. 77) These theories of relational power and social space serve as the foundation of ideas of urbanism, climate urbanism, and just climate urbanism explored in the remainder of this chapter.

### **2.3 Urbanism and Climate Change**

Urbanism as a field of study is the relationship between the built environment and social life (McCann, 2017). Urbanism is deeply complex. Urbanism is interdisciplinary and recognizes that an ideology of space and justice “cannot be understood in isolation from each other and that the dualisms implicit in western thought cannot be bridged, only collapsed” (Harvey, 1973). An “understanding of urbanism...requires that we understand how human activity creates the need for specific spatial concepts” (Harvey, 1973, p. 14). Urbanism is a catch basin for cultural

features. This deeply social understanding of urban space serves as the base for the subsequent theoretical frameworks, research, and analysis.

Climate change actions and solutions ushered in by the rise of the “sustainability director” and “resiliency office” at the local level presents a new driver of urban spatial restructuring and most climate impacts and adaptation responses will reshape urban built environments, politics, and stressors of inequality (Shi, 2021) in a way that requires solutions at the scale of that unique urban context. As cities continue to adopt green interventions meant to decarbonize and adapt, they must grapple with questions of economy, race and class in the context of the climate crisis if they are to avoid extreme exacerbation of pre-existing inequality (Anguelovski et al., 2019).

Building on ideas of space that are social and notions of urbanism that reflect society, climate impacts put the complexity of urbanism in a pressure cooker. ‘Climate urbanism’ is urbanization in the age of climate change (Bhardwaj, 2021). Climate urbanism is fundamentally interdisciplinary and sits at the nexus of urban geography, political science, environmental studies, and urban planning (Bhardwaj, 2021). Climate changed urbanism illuminates the injustices that are baked into urban space in the United States.

The literature on climate urbanism offers a theoretical container that both captures the essential role of the urban in addressing the climate crisis and articulates a fundamental challenge of addressing climate in urban geographies of production and capital accumulation. Climate urbanism explores the urban as a critical scale of climate action.

The literature on climate urbanism places those invested in climate prepared cities at a crossroads. Scholars argue that climate urbanism can be a “neo-liberal project” (Robin & Broto, 2021) that emphasizes a “market-oriented, profit-driven, and technocratic development strategy

that appeals to elite priorities of dominant institutions” (Long & Rice, 2021) The literature also articulates the alternative pathway that climate urbanism can take as a “New Climate Urbanism.” This radical, transformative, and just climate urbanism assumes cities are the appropriate place for climate action, but grounds itself in notions of space that are fundamentally radical by acknowledging power and concerning itself with underlying root paradigms and worldviews (Bhardwaj, 2021).

To understand *status quo climate urbanism*, one must understand the dominant mode of urbanization in a climate changed city. The current urban climate agenda fails to adequately address the root causes of the climate crisis as well as the root cause of social inequity (Meerow et al., 2019). “Numerous studies have shown that hazards disproportionately impact low-income and minority communities, that they receive fewer resources to recover, and that disruptions often exacerbate inequality” (Meerow et al., 2019). And yet, research agendas to identify solutions often overlooks those most impacted. The literature on climate urbanism calls for “a comprehensive climate urbanism research agenda [that] engage[s] with the multiple locations of climate action, often perceived as marginal” (Bhardwaj, 2021, p. 24). It is critical to note that just acknowledging disproportionate impacts and centering vulnerable communities is not enough to shift paradigms. In the environmental justice movement, this shows up as making a distinction made between equal distribution of hazards versus an intersectional approach that addresses the root causes of injustice and unsustainability.

There is little evidence that the theory of equitable climate action permeates into the realities of practice (Long & Rice, 2019). For example, in October of 2022 the Institute for Building Technology and Safety published a report entitled *Equitable Climate Resilience for U.S. Local Governments*. This report found that of the 200 municipal governments interviewed for the

research, 81% agreed that centering equity in climate resilience was a priority for their jurisdiction. However, few reported successes in implementing equity in climate resilience. In fact, 25% reported “some success” and 0% reported “significant success” (Johnson, 2022). These findings reflect a reality that municipal leaders understand the benefits of improving equitable outcomes in climate action but lack concrete understanding of what that tangibly means in the day-to-day operations of running a city. This thesis is designed to ground theory in practice and provide municipal leaders with tangible tools and catalytic actions that they can take across sectors to successfully center equity in climate resiliency.

It is not only the dominant narrative of future action towards climate proofing, both resilience and decarbonization, that are subject to the story of the status quo. It also permeates into our culture's understanding of climate impacts. In his book “Katrina: A history, 1915-2015” Andy Horowitz refers to scholarship that puts “natural disasters” into question “because who is in harm's way is the product of political decisions and social arrangements, rather than the inevitable order of things” (Horowitz, 2020, p. 13). He goes on to claim that “vulnerability is socially constructed” (Horowitz, 2020, p. 13). The clear relationship established between socially constructed race and centuries of intentionally constructed inequities that has come to be known as “Katrina” and many other “natural disasters” nourish capitalist narratives of recovery and pre-disaster mitigation (Horowitz, 2020). This idea has come to be known as disaster capitalism. Disaster capitalism can be “national and transnational governmental institutions’ instrumental use of catastrophe (both so-called “natural” and human-mediated disasters, including post conflict situations) to promote and empower a range of private, neoliberal capitalist interests” (Schuller & Maldonado, 2016).

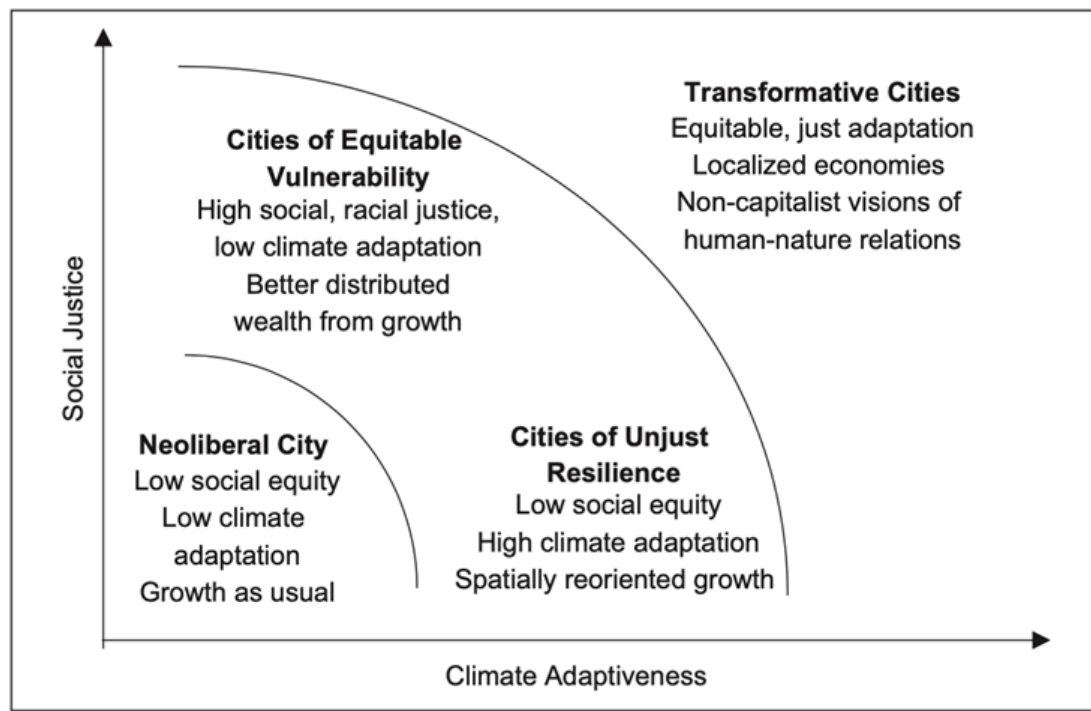
Because climate change is linked to broader social, political, and economic processes, then climate solutions must account for these cultural paradigms as well. Particularly because multiple injustices occur when the needs and desires of vulnerable groups are deprioritized through inaction or through solutions centering neoliberal market based notions of urban planning, policy and practice that are not just.

Proponents of a “new climate urbanism,” or just climate urbanism as it will be referenced in this thesis, argue that resilience and climate action in the urban context must be intentionally just in order to avoid the harms of the current economic, political and social paradigm (Ranganathan & Bratman, 2021). Just climate urbanism reframes climate action from the vulnerable needing aid from systems and institutions to recognizing that our socially and politically designed systems produced vulnerability in the first place.

In, *towards a postcolonial perspective on climate urbanism* Robin and Broto claim that just climate urbanism offers “a critical perspective on the operation of power and capital” in the city. Climate urbanism is the development and planning of cities in the context of catastrophic global climate change and just climate urbanism looks not just at climate change impacts and solutions in an urban context, but also what is at the root cause of climate change and how climate solutions unfolding in cities address these fundamental and root matters (Robin & Broto, 2021).

Just climate action at the urban scale is thus not just about “climate proofing” existing structures and systems, but about deliberately and fundamentally changing systems to achieve more just and equitable outcomes. This implies investigating the factors that maintain the status quo and strategically addressing them to intentionally shift systems in new directions. Advocates for transformative climate action are not only trying to solve the math problem of carbon

neutrality but also concern themselves with postcapitalist, postcolonial economies focused on collective well-being and nurturing human-nature relationships (Shi, 2021).



**Figure 2.1:** Shi, L., & Moser, S. (2021). Transformative climate adaptation in the United States: Trends and prospects. *Science (American Association for the Advancement of Science)*, 372(6549), 1408-. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abc8054>

Figure 2.1 offers a visual explanation of the two pathways described above and highlights the reality that you can have justice without resilience and you can have resilience without justice (Shi & Moser, 2021). The “neoliberal city” is comparable to the “status quo climate urbanism” and “transformative cities” comparable to the “just climate urbanism” described above. Notions of a new, radical, and transformative climate urbanism have roots in critical urban theory and Marxism. “Critical urban theory emphasizes the politically and ideologically mediated, socially contested and therefore malleable character of urban space - that is, its continual (re)construction as a site, medium and outcome of historically specific relationships and social power” (Brenner, 2009). Within this framework of critical urban theory, which argues

that the built environments of cities are inextricably linked with social, political, and power dynamics, municipal decision makers can influence these dynamics through choices made about the built environment that stem from land use planning, capital improvement programs, and hazard mitigation planning. To work in the realm of the physical urban landscape without considering the social, political, and power dynamics (historical and present) would (re)construct environments overlaid upon current systems.

Marxism is not only at the root of critical urban theory but also is the underlying ideology of urban geographers like Harvey and Lefebvre who's definition of space is the foundation for this thesis. Marxist perspectives on the city revolve around class and the relationship between class and subjugation of the city. This lens on the urban through that of class struggle sees the city as a site of production and accumulation rather than as a site of community that is life-giving (Katznelson, 1993)

According to Marx and Marxist urban scholars, entire cities were transformed from "places into products" as banks and high-income homeowners could profit from luxury real estate in neighborhoods that had once been considered unsafe for investment. These private investments in cities had financial benefits not only for the developers, landlords, and banks but the cities themselves grew to be financially dependent on property value increases. The reliance on property values to generate revenue for local governments has created a deep dependence on continuously increasing the market value of land in order to prop up city budgets and it can be difficult to have local government led action that keeps housing truly affordable. This capitalist paradigm exemplified through the need to grow property values in urban spaces demonstrates the concern of status quo climate urbanism. Cities are a site for climate action and thus a critical

focus of climate justice movements. Climate urbanism through a Marxist lens leads us to climate justice, a movement deeply rooted in class struggle.

Since the start of political dialogue on climate action, both policy and academic conversations have included questions of justice. (Bulkeley et al., 2013) While mainstream debates on climate change have been significantly scientist based and largely technical and in tension with climate denialism, the role of justice has increasingly become integrated into the conversation (Sultana, 2022). Climate justice at the urban scale, just climate urbanisms, offer a framework to acknowledge and address the inequities presented in a climate changed city (Sultana, 2022). Section 2.4 puts climate justice literature in conversation with the literature on abolitionist democracy.

## **2.4 Climate Justice and Abolition Democracy**

The climate justice movement sits at the nexus of climate change and social justice. The inequities climate change presents is both a geophysical and a political phenomenon. Geophysically, climate change amplifies pre existing inequalities and vulnerabilities through the disruption of ecosystems, livelihoods, infrastructures, access to land and water, etc. Politically, action for climate change mobilizes finance, deploys technology, and develops new social and organizational infrastructures that both strengthen and challenge existing power structures (Newell, 2022). In both the geophysical and political spheres of climate change, climate justice offers a framework to focus on “who benefits, who loses out, in what ways, where, and why” (Sultana, 2022, p.119).

To continue in the discussion at the intersection of climate and justice, core elements of justice are explained in table 2.1.

Element of Justice	Definition	Source(s)
Procedural	“The extent to which individual and organizational actions are able to meaningfully participate in the decision making process.”	(Ryder, 2018)
Distributional	“Just outcomes" i.e. the “fair allocation of material goods to all members of society.”	(Meerow et al., 2019, p. 797)
Recognitional	An approach to justice that acknowledges not just the material impacts injustice, but the emotional as well. The implementation of recognitional justice requires procedural justice in that “it demands sitting down with those who are, or may be, affected by different politics to appreciate potential impacts from their perspective. These impacts can be social, political, and cultural impacts.	(Preston & Carr, 2018)
Transformative	“The work of addressing harm at the root, outside of mechanisms of the state, so that we can grow into right relationship <sup>7</sup> with each other.”	(brown, 2020, p.5)
Intergenerational	People in the future can not advocate for themselves and thus present day people can and must advocate on their behalf.	(Truccone-Borgogno, 2019)
Restorative	Efforts to heal, reconcile, and forgive.	(Motupalli, n.d.)

**Table 2.1:** Elements of social and climate justice

<sup>7</sup> “Right Relationship is a broad concept that describes an ethical paradigm for how we interact with the many other beings of our world, including other people, plants, animals, cultures, and ecosystems (Etheridge Foundation. June 29, 2023. Retrieved on April 8, 2023 from <https://www.etheridgefoundation.org/learn/what-is-right-relationship>).”

The climate justice movement demands the inclusion of frontline communities as full participants with agency to shape the decisions that affect them (Malloy & Ashcraft, 2020). The following definition of frontline communities is from *Turning the Tide: Advancing Racial Justice in Federal Flood Infrastructure Projects*:

Frontline communities are groups of people who are directly affected by climate change and inequality in society at higher rates than people who have more power in society. They are “on the frontlines” of the problem. For example, people of color, people who are low income, who have disabilities, who are children or elderly, who are LGBTQIA, who identify as women, etc. have less advantages and access to resources in our society than other people. In the context of climate change, frontline communities’ health, income, and access to resources is less than people who have social privilege (people who are white, upper middle-class or upper-class, able bodied, in middle age ranges, heterosexual, nontrans, etc.). In other words, people who experience oppression because of race, income, gender, sexual orientation, disability, gender identity, age, etc. are more likely to have less resources and protections in our society in general and even less access to resources and protections not only to adapt to our changing climate but also to pass policies and legislation that are fair and culturally significant (Beeman, Bock, McGinnis, Becker, Magos, Navabi, Neely, Zumwal, Lee, Patterson, Evans, McClanahan, Okotie-Oyekan, 2021, p. 16)

Arnstein’s “Ladder of Citizen Participation” offers a linear framework for public participation that ranges from “manipulation” under non participation to “citizen control” (Arnstein, 1969). She claims “citizen participation is a categorical term for citizen power.” Arnstein notes that a drawback of this framework is that it does not address the “most significant roadblocks to achieving genuine levels of participation” (Arnstein, 1969) i.e. shifting power to “citizens”.

Other scholars have sought to explore this question by addressing these roadblocks. In, *From citizen participation to government participation*, Mees writes about the reality that wealthier and more educated citizens are more included in coproduction of policy priorities given the inequitable realities of democratic participation. Mees discusses the shifting role of government from regulating and steering to collaborative and responsive government. (Mees et

al., 2019) This new role of government, one that addresses the inequities in democratic participation, must be addressed for climate justice futures to unfold.

To acknowledge that addressing a new role of government is to address inequities in democratic participation implies the reality that historically government has not been authentically democratic in governing. Racism is entangled with the anti-democratic practices in the United State (Du Bois, 1935). Angela Davis has argued that for “authentic democracy” to emerge, “abolition democracy” must first be enacted. To Davis, “abolition democracy” means the abolition of institutions that advance the dominance of any one group over another. Davis discussing this notion of abolitionist democracy in the context of anti-racist abolition movements in U.S. history including slavery, lynching, and segregation (Davis, 2005). Given the racism baked into climate impacts and outcomes of climate solutions, actualizing climate justice will require an abolitionist framework.

The notion of abolition democracy was first introduced by W.E.B. Du Bois in his 1935 book *Black Reconstruction* (Du Bois, 1935). His arguments are explicitly Marxist. In this work he infused Marxist class analysis into anti-racism (Horne, 2022). Marx and Engels subscribed to the philosophy of “dialectical materialism” which instead focused on evolution and the material world. “Justice for abolitionists is an integrated endeavor to prevent harm, intervene in harm, obtain reparations, and transform the conditions in which we live” (McLeod, 2019). A dialectical materialist and abolitionist perspective on climate justice is one that is grounded in complex histories and results in material transformations.

Ruth Wilson Gilmore captures the Marxist and DeBoisian idea of abolition democracy (DuBois, 1935) by describing abolition as presence and building institutions that are life-affirming (Gilmore, 2007). Thus , “to realize justice in abolitionist terms thus entails a

holistic engagement with the structural conditions that give rise to suffering, as well as the interpersonal dynamics involved in violence” (McLeod, 2019). Including a climate lens, realizing climate justice requires an engagement with the structural and systematic material realities that enable climate change and inequitable actions in response to climate change. Looking at climate justice through an abolitionist framework enables one to imagine alternatives outside of current societal assumptions.

When climate justice is put in conversation with abolition, the “inconceivable” becomes possible. Climate justice offers a pathway to extending abolitionist movements to global capitalism broadly. Abolitionist philosopher Lisa Guenther calls for “collective resistance and revolution at the scene of the ‘crime’ itself” (Guenther, 2013). When it comes to global capitalism, arguably the “scene of the crime” is embodied and embedded throughout the material world. From the urbanist perspectives in which this work is theoretically grounded, cities are the appropriate scale to address issues of economy, property, governance, and infrastructure which are often the sites of capitalism in urban landscapes<sup>8</sup>. The following quote describes a cultural paradigm that “there is no alternative” to a capitalist economic model

Since it is the very organization of the economy that is at the root of climate disruption, the thinking that mitigation and adaptation activities should be accompanied by the least amount of disruption to the economy further reinforces the problem. An argument is often made across the political spectrum to ensure the least amount of economic harm to individuals and corporations. There is an underlying assumption that a solution can and must be found without transitioning from ever-increasing industrial development because that notion is either inconceivable or undesirable. Another assumption is that economic consolidation and globalization, along with the continued concentration of capital in the hands of a few, is a social virtue. Furthermore, the current global economy is often

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<sup>8</sup> Keeping in mind of course the legal constraints, the critical role of working collectively as part of an ecosystem of state and federal governments, NGOs, etc.

framed as timeless, immutable and monolithic. Nothing could be further from the truth. The current economy is not forever. As noted earlier, economic growth that outpaces or erodes the capacity of ecosystems to regenerate undermines the very basis of the system. Economic growth will become increasingly unstable and eventually unravel if we follow the TINA (There Is No Alternative) train of thought (DeBacker et al, 2015, p. 24 and 25).

Climate and environmental justice movements are centered on low-income communities of color and partially born with labor movements (Córdova et al., 2022). A preeminent U.S. based organization, the Climate Justice Alliance, was formed to make collective impact across national and regional grassroots organizations to ensure there was a “just transition” away from fossil-fuel. This stems from a core perspective within the climate justice movement that climate change is yet another symptom of an economic model that is not working.

Climate Justice Alliance, a group of 65-plus frontline and movement building organizations and networks across the country, has articulated a framework for “Just Transition”. This framework advocates a paradigm shift away from an extractive economy predicated on “global plunder, the profit-driven industrial economy rooted in patriarchy and white supremacy” to a regenerative economy that focuses on “redressing past harms and creating new relationships of power for the future through reparations (*Climate Justice Alliance Just Transition Principles, 2019*).

The suite of economic alternatives that fall within the post-capitalist umbrella take many names. These include, but are not limited to, resilient, solidarity, regenerative, and cooperative economics. Experts in alternative economic futures undoubtedly know each name's unique lineage and what it evolves (for some examples see (Loh & Agyeman, 2019) and (Shannon et al., 2022)).

Solidarity economies include a wide range of practices that span economic, social, environmental, political, communitarian or holistic dimensions. In solidarity economics “ordinary people play an active role in shaping all of the dimensions of human life: economic,

social, cultural, political, and environmental” (Réseau Intercontinental de Promotion de l’Économie Sociale Solidaire, n.d.). The principles of a solidarity economy include solidarity, equity, democracy, sustainability, and pluralism.

Social element above refers to infrastructure which is defined as systems that support people such as healthcare, childcare, job training, unions, political campaigns, and mutual aid. Erick Klineneberg argues that the shared spaces in communities such as parks, libraries, churches are the sites where social infrastructure is built. Kleinenberg argues that these informal, social, and relational networks of care are keys to unlocking the type of democratic collaboration that is required for addressing a suite of society issues, including climate change (Klinenberg, 2018).

In *The Emancipation Circuit*, Thulani Davis traces the human networks developed during Reconstruction to imagine, enact, and defend freedom. This uniquely abolitionist example of social networks to imagine and enact a previously unimaginable world has implications for the actualizing of climate justice at the scale of the urban. Often referred to in climate spaces as “social resilience” there is a clear understanding of the role of community building in ensuring resilient urban futures.

From a relational view of urban space, land use and property are physical sites of power in a city. Themes of collective land governance are emerging in conversation about climate justice, which ties directly to democracy, participation, and procedural justice. The climate justice literature frequently points to the critical relationship between private property, capitalism, and inequality; these elements are often considered to be at the very root of the climate crisis (Perkins, 2019).

Many guidelines and adaptation plans further advocate that cities adopt land-and growth-based financing mechanisms, such as property taxes and municipal bonds, to implement

adaptation projects (Shi, 2021). The relationship between urban green and climate infrastructure and the gentrification of urban residential, commercial and industrial spaces is well established in the literature (Anguelovski et al., 2019). The dynamic of green gentrification stems from the nature of urban land as sites for capital market dynamics. Once, in a conversation with an activist and colleagues, I was asked “is it resilient if you can’t stay?” This question has stuck with me as a practitioner and informs the perspective that climate action at the urban scale must contend with displacement. In *What a City Is For* Matt Hern states:

Considering displacement is to ask who deserves access to land and why, and those answers, or at least those questions strike me straight at the heart of what a city should be for. Cities should be setting us free, and in many ways and for many of us, they do. But all cities are built on colonial plunder, and most, certainly those in my part of the world, have been built on the backs of racist dominations and unearned privilege (Hern, 2016, p.15).

Hern goes on to propose a “deeper, non-property based way of thinking” in order to navigate injustices present within cities, planning, and consequently local climate action (Hern, 2016). This suggestion is abolitionist at its core. It suggests that our cities do not have to be as they are today, and we can collectively choose to build alternatives together. I chose to weave together the discussion of climate justice with abolitionist ideas of democracy because they both require engagement with the structural conditions that give rise to climate produced and reproduced inequalities.

## **2.5 Systems Theory**

Embedded throughout the discourse on climate justice are notions of systemic failures and the call to address root causes of these systemic injustices. For example, the NAACP Environmental Justice Program states that “the root causes of the problems our communities face—like climate change, racism, and economic inequality—are all deeply connected. Since the

problems are connected, so are the solutions” (Beeman et al, 2021, p.16). Systems thinking offers a theoretical framework for making sense of complexity and explores ways to successfully address these root causes.

In *Thinking in Systems*, Donella Meadows defines a system as an “interconnected set of elements that is coherently organized in a way that achieves something” (Meadows, 2008, p. 11). Every system has elements, purpose, and interconnections. Elements of a system are typically the tangible, visible parts. For example, in a city, elements include the built environment, residents, city staff and elected officials. Elements also include less tangible things like city pride. The second component of a system is its function or purpose. “Purposes are deducted from behavior, not rhetoric or stated goals” (Meadows, 2008, p. 14). For example, the purpose of our economy is to grow larger at cost to people and nature even when the rhetoric around the economy tends to be “supporting people and families.” Interconnections, the third critical ingredient of a system, is the set of “relationships that hold the elements together” (Meadows, 2008, p. 13). For example, in a city interconnections might include governance, economy, and policies.

Meadows offers a hierarchy of places - or “leverage points” - to effectively and strategically intervene in a system. “Leverage points are points of power” (Meadows, 2008, pg 145). The least effective leverage point in a system is to exchange a single element (or even a set of elements). In a city system, this means that the focus on electing new city leaders or hiring new ones alone does not significantly change the system itself.

Alternatively, Meadows finds that “changing interconnections in a system can change it dramatically” (Meadows, 2008, p.16). Systems operate by receiving feedback. For example, policies enabling solar energy will create good jobs and further increase solar energy. With feedback loops, the overall system will continue to function; this is because almost every system

aims “to ensure its own perpetuation” (Meadows, 2008, p. 15). Understanding this critical systems dynamic removes the blame from individual people or elements, and instead offers the opportunity to look at the whole. Meadows points out that “The concept of feedback opens up the idea that a system can cause its own behavior” (Meadows, 2008, pg 34). While Meadows’s primer offers accessible language for explaining systems theory and thus is the solo citation in this explanation of systems theory, her work reflects a long lineage and series of collaborations with other often cited systems theorists including Jay W. Forrester (examples include (J. W. Forrester, 2016)), (J. W. Forrester, 2007), (J. Forrester, n.d.)(1987)).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter lays out the theoretical framework that supports the ideology, methodology, and findings in the following chapter. Through an exploration of local government law, urban geography, climate urbanism, abolitionist framework for climate justice, and systems theory this chapter lays out the case for what the role of municipalities can be, why justice must be at the center of local climate action, and how the literature on climate justice makes sense of specific responsibilities of local government. The next chapter will build on this literature review and outline the methodology utilized for this thesis.

## Chapter 3: Methods and Methodology

This chapter will describe the selected methodology and process utilized for the analysis and recommendations in subsequent chapters. This thesis is an exploration of how municipal governments can act in alignment with the vision of Climate Justice Alliance (CJA) by exploring *what climate justice organizations are asking of municipalities and how these demands can be seeded in municipal climate policy*. This thesis utilizes content analysis as the primary method for conducting the research. For the purposes of this research, content analysis is defined as when the researcher gathers and analyzes documents that are relevant to the research question. Content analysis is a systematic examination of documents (Columbia University, n.d.).

### 3.1 Methodology

The methodology for this research centers a Black feminist framework in both the design and analysis. To center *feminist* methodologies in the development of the research instrument is to acknowledge the limitations of traditional research methods in part because research requires human input and therefore is not objective (Eichler, 1997.). Feminist geographers center ‘reflexivity’ in their research design, methods, and analysis - this approach examines the relationships between the participants and the researchers, with the aim of putting the researcher, the researched and the research in context (Rose, 1997; Dodgson, 2019). Feminist thinker and scholar Donna Haraway described a collective of reflexive researchers as the experience of being embodied. This is in comparison masculine scientists who are not able to center their “bodies” meaning their positionality and lived experience (Haraway, 1988).

*Black* feminist methodologies add a critical and liberatory dimension to this work. Scholar Patricia Hamilton offers intersectionality as a “tool to tease out” dilemmas of reflexivity and power dynamics that show up in the research process (Hamilton, 2020). Kimberle Crenshaw

coined the term intersectionality in 1989 when describing the failure of the feminist and anti racist discourse to consider overlapping identities of Black women (Crenshaw, 1991). In designing and conducting this research, I have aimed to acknowledge my own positionality and power in relation to the research subjects, and also to recognize that of others. This approach draws attention to the complex intersecting oppressions associated with climate change, but also recognizes and lifts up the unique, community-based knowledge and opportunities for action that are often overlooked, ignored, or otherwise invisibilized by other types of analyses. Because I utilize a Black feminist framework to understand the demands of climate justice organizations and analyze the implications of these demands for municipal climate praxis, the recommendations that emerge from this work are intentionally geared towards equity, justice and emancipation.

The research instrument outlined below is built on feminist methodologies and frameworks, paying particular attention to critical Black feminist approaches (e.g. Hamilton, 2020 and Collins, 2019). The core motivation for conducting a content analysis of preexisting resources provided to the public from climate justice organizations, was to acknowledge that these groups, and the people who make up these organizations, have already told municipal decision makers what they need and want. My role as the researcher is to dig into these existing resources to gain a deeper understanding of the needs and recommendations of front-line communities facing climate change impacts, and to amplify these messages without requiring these community members to commit more of their resources to an extensive interviewing or other, similar data collection method.

Centering myself as the researcher is critically important for black feminist methodologies. My experiences also deeply relate to this topic selection and how I seek to

approach unpacking answers to the research question. I have been deeply concerned since I was a child and first learned about climate change (yes from Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*). As a white woman with relative class privilege, decentering my experiences in what climate action can and should look like has been a process of listening, asking new questions, and empathy. I have been working with cities on climate action - in the non-profit, public, and private sectors - for 7 years and over that time have found myself asking these research questions that this thesis explores. Fully acknowledging my role as a researcher and potential biases I may have entails that the process can be clearly outlined so that data collection instruments could be replicated by future researchers who will bring their own unique lens and biases to the process. The remainder of this chapter seeks to do that.

### **3.2 Methods**

The research instrument described below is designed to conduct a content analysis of documents produced by national frontline climate justice organizations. "Content analysis rests on the assumption that texts are a rich data source with great potential to reveal valuable information about particular phenomena" (Kondracki et al., 2002). The core purpose of a content analysis is to "identify and interpret meaning in recorded forms of communication by isolating small pieces of the data that represent salient concepts and then applying or creating a framework to organize the pieces in a way that can be used to describe or explain a phenomenon" (Kolbe & Burnett, 1991). However there are many different types of content analysis. This analysis is a conceptual analysis, meaning that the focus of the research was on looking for the existence of certain keywords, themes, and ideas in the text, but not seeking to develop further relationships among or across those concepts (Columbia University, n.d.).

In conceptual analysis, one can code on different scales, from words to themes. For this thesis, words are used as clues to look for themes. Thus, the level of my analysis focuses primarily on themes, but I use specific word searches as a way to start the identification process. This type of analysis allows me to code for both frequency and existence of a concept, theme or idea.

To develop the research instrument, the first step was identifying municipal-scale power and agency relevant to climate change actions in the United States. I code documents for an initial set of key themes based on the literature review, but I also allow for the identification of emergent themes. The latter is to ensure flexibility through the coding process to identify themes based on the text itself vs as a predetermined set themes. This approach allows new and important material to come through in the analysis and not just what the academic literature leads me to look for. The specific nodes outlined in table 3.1 are based on municipal responsibilities and explored in the literature review (see Chapter 2 for more legal details):

Municipalities generally take responsibility for parks and recreation services, police and fire departments, housing services, emergency medical services, municipal courts, transportation services (including public transportation), and public works (streets, sewers, snow removal, signage, and so forth (The White House (n.d.)).

Validity comes when you are consistent and coherent (Validity comes when you are consistent and coherent (Columbia University, n.d.). To be clear about how to distinguish between concepts, see table 3.2 for a code library and 3.3 for the code definitions.

Row	Parent node	Child nodes	Sub-child nodes (context clues)
1	<i>Economy</i>	<i>Extrative, Transition, regenerative</i>	Degrowth, extract, inequality, transition
2	<i>Land</i>	<i>Property,</i>	Commons, private,

		<i>undeveloped land, siting, acquisition</i>	housing
3	<i>Governance</i>	<i>Democracy, participation</i>	Community - (led, based, centered),
4	<i>Infrastructure</i>	<i>Human, built</i>	Workforce, waste management, emergency services, police and fire, water, sewer, parks, broadband, Energy
5	<i>Municipal scale</i>	<i>Race, power, climate change</i>	City, town, village
6	<i>Emergent parent nodes</i>	<i>Child node within that parent nodes</i>	/
7	<i>Parent node in rows 1 - 5</i>	<i>Emergent child node(s)</i>	/

**Table 3.1:** Research codes

The unique nodes of municipal government influence outlined in Figure 3.2 were utilized to develop codes for looking at the documents and resources provided publicly by the Climate Justice Alliance. “Climate Justice Alliance (CJA) formed in 2013 to create a new center of gravity in the climate movement by uniting frontline communities and organizations into a formidable force” (Climate Justice Alliance, n.d.). Their role as a unifying force in the Climate Justice movement remains and was the primary rationale for this scoping of organizations. Figure 3.1 shows the 17 national organizations who were part of the Climate Justice Alliance.

The climate justice movement is broad. It ranged from the hyper local to international. I turned to the climate justice alliance because it is a “member alliance of 84 urban and rural frontline communities, organizations, and supporting networks in the climate justice movement.” They categorize their membership by regional, national and global scope. I chose to focus my analysis on the nation because I wanted to explore implications for U.S. municipal climate policy broadly because of my positionality. I work for the national league of cities and wanted the findings to be relevant for municipalities across the country. However, the methods outlined below are designed to be easily applied another scale

This list is from January 2023, but will likely evolve over time.

<b>Climate Justice Alliance &amp; National Organizations in the Climate Justice Alliance</b>	
1. Climate Justice Alliance	11. National Family Farm Coalition
2. The Chisholm Legacy Project	12. Native Organizers Alliance
3. Center for Earth, Energy, and Democracy (CEED)	13. New Economy Coalition
4. Center for Story-based Strategy	14. Rising Tide North American
5. Energy Justice Network	15. The Ruckus Society
6. Jobs with Justice	16. US Food Sovereignty Alliance
7. Just Transition Alliance	17. National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
8. Labor Network for Sustainability	Environmental and Climate Justice Program
9. Movement Generation	
10. Movement Strategy Center	

**Table 3.2:** Climate Justice Alliance, National Members, Retrieved in January, 2023

After the identification of organizations, the next process was document selection. The website of each organization was explored for tabs or navigation tools to search for “resources” or “documents.” Publicly available documents were filtered through the lens of the research questions; not all resources were relevant for this project. The document selection process is one way that subjectivity seeps in. As a climate policy practitioner, I used my best judgment about

what documents are most relevant for decision makers and will best answer the questions outlined in this research. I pull those documents into a table with organization title, document title and document location URL. I track each document and its codes in Excel. Table 3.3 defines each of the parent and child codes outlined in Figure 3.2 and thus highlights the themes I was searching for in the research process.

<b>Code</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Parent node	What local governments have the power to do and thus the fault lines of their unique role in the ecosystem of the climate justice movement.
Child node	Key sub categories or essential layers within the parent nodes.
Economy	System of production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services.
Extrative	An economic and political system in which a country's trade and industry are controlled by private owners for profit. Exactive economy because it is not designed around the question “what is enough” and “what can we sustain.” Not cooperative or solidarity economies.
Transition	Anything that references a transition from one economic model to another. Not indicating from what to what.
Regenerative	A regenerative economy is one that has abolished extractive business models and uplifts life giving practices. This can include some forms of communism and socialism but is not focused on the principles of a specific economic model.
Land	The part of the earth's surface that serves as the literal foundation of urban built environments.
Property	A thing or things belonging to someone(s). For the purposes of this research, property refers to undeveloped urban land, structures on the land including but not limited to homes, buildings, industrial sites of production.
Undeveloped land	Undeveloped land is vacant land. In this case it is not land specifically zoned for certain land use but this code means any raw land. Using “undeveloped to include community gardens.”
Siting	The location of certain assets. Not a governance or decision making process for asset sighting.

Acquisition	The process by which land is obtained. Not referring to a formal or legal process of real estate acquisition but rather the idea of acquiring land not previously in one's possession.
Governance	The action or manner of governing. This can include formal and informal political organization and decision making.
Democracy	A process and/or procedure of inclusion, shared power, and participation. For this analysis, democracy is not limited to a formal system of government but rather a mechanism of procedural decision making that is community controlled and collaborative.
Participation	The action of participating in the physical and political shaping of a municipal environment. This is not participation in other spheres beyond the political. This tag also includes instances when there was NOT participation.
Infrastructure	Infrastructure is social and physical. Does not include housing (that falls under land and private property in this code book)
Human	Systems that involved people such as healthcare, childcare, job training as well as less formal social forms of organizing like unions, political campaigns, and mutual aid.
Built	The physical elements that make up urban spaces.
Municipal scale	A city or town that has corporate status and local government.. Geographic boundaries of a municipal government. Includes towns and villages. Does not include counties or regional governments. Terms referencing this node might include but are not limited to: <i>Urban (ization), city, town, village, neighborhood, communities.</i>
Race	A social construct built around the color of a person's skin used to create a system of dominance, colonialism, and violence. References to this lens might include the following terminology: <i>Demographics, race, Black, POC, racism, equity, race, white supremacy.</i>
Power	Relational force that gives the capacity or ability to direct or influence the behavior of others or the course of events. Terms referencing power could include: <i>Abolition, liberation, relational.</i>
Climate change	Climate change is both a geophysical and a political phenomenon. For the purposes of this coding climate change means humans cause geophysical changes to earth's climate. This definition does also include the political dimensions of climate change through proposed and potential solutions.. Search term could include but are not limited to: <i>Vulnerability, Flooding, heat, Extreme weather, precarity</i>

Emergent parent node	What local governments have the power to do and thus the fault lines of their unique role in the ecosystem of the climate justice movement that falls outside of the predetermined parent nodes.
Emergent child node	Key sub categories or essential layers within the parent nodes that were not identified in the design of the research instrument laid out in this chapter.

**Table 3.3:** Research code definitions

The systematic coding methodology presented in this chapter provided a framework in which to be a humble listener and learner from frontline communities at the margins (see chapter 2) of climate change impacts. Approaching research on climate urbanism by focusing on marginalized forms of knowledge and “attempts to adapt to and cope with a changing climate that we see emerging” (Bhardwaj, 2021, p. 23) by frontline communities challenges the existence of universal knowledge and embraces decolonial ways of thinking. The findings from the implementation of this analysis are presented in Chapter 4.

## Chapter 4: Findings

Using the research methods described in Chapter 3, this research has found that National Climate Justice Alliance (CJA) members widely critique status quo approaches to climate action, and simultaneously offer a range of pathways forward to achieve bold and transformational changes in this space. This thesis is an exploration of how municipal governments could operate in alignment with the vision of CJA by asking *what climate justice organizations are asking of municipalities* and *how these demands can be seeded in municipal climate policy?* This chapter lays out the data with minimal accompanying discussion. Chapter 5 discusses these findings and how they respond to the research questions.

The findings described in this chapter maintain the framework outlined in the methods by focusing on municipal government nodes of power: economy, land use, governance, infrastructure. The underlying assumption of this research design is that each node of municipal government responsibility comes with a critical opportunity to align with climate justice movements that represent people most impacted by current systems of oppression and climate change.

One overarching finding is that not every organization that is part of the CJA publishes reports and documents on their publicly available websites. Of the 17 organizations who are National Climate Justice Alliance members, just over 50%, or nine in total, had publicly available resources and documents that met the criteria outlined in Chapter 3 for relevant resources. Of those nine organizations, the Climate Justice Alliance itself and the NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Program had two and three documents respectively that were relevant for answering the research questions. Table 4.1 outlines the twelve documents analyzed for this research.

<b>Document number</b>	<b>Document title</b>	<b>National Climate Justice Alliance Organization</b>
1	Celebrating a Decade of Our Power: 2022 Annual Report	Climate Justice Alliance
2	Climate Justice Alliance Just Transition Principles	Climate Justice Alliance
3	A Framework for Local Action on Climate Change: 9 Ways Mayors Can Build Resilient and Just Cities	Center for Earth, Energy, and Democracy
4	Environmental Justice and The Alliance for a Just Transition: Grist for Climate Justice Planning	Just Transition Alliance
5	Pathways to Resilience: Transforming Cities in a Changing Climate	Movement Strategy Center
6	Unleashing the Power of the People: Lessons on Public Engagement for Environmental and Climate Justice	NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Program
7	Turning the Tide: Advancing Racial Justice in Federal Flood Infrastructure Projects	NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Program
8	Engaging With Public Utilities and Public Service Commissions	NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Program
9	Why Carbon Markets Won't Work for Agriculture	National Family Farm Coalition
10	From Protests, To the Ballot Box, and Beyond: Building Indigenous POWER	Native Organizers Alliance
11	Climate-Related Investments for Resilient Communities	New Economy Coalition
12	US Food Sovereignty Alliance: Our History	US Food Sovereignty Alliance

**Table 4.1:** Documents analyzed

Of the twelve documents analyzed for this research, 175 excerpts of text were coded. *Economy*, defined as systems of production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services, emerged as the most coded node across all the documents. Given the focus of CJA on just transition, this finding is not surprising. *Municipal scale* was tagged and coded the least. Table 4.2 highlights the distribution of parent node tags identified across the data.

Parent Codes	Total tags	Percent of total
Economy	63	36.00%
Governance	49	28.00%
Infrastructure	36	20.57%
Land	17	9.71%
Municipal scale	10	5.71%
<i>Total</i>	<i>175</i>	<i>100%</i>

**Table 4.2:** Distribution of parent codes

The core findings within each of the parent nodes are outlined below.

### ***Economy***

Coding revealed that CJA members are asking that collective priorities and actions support a just transition to a regenerative economy. The Climate Justice Alliance utilizes the just transition as an umbrella to represent a suite of solutions and approaches to shifting “whole communities to build thriving economies that provide dignified, productive and ecologically sustainable livelihoods, democratic governance and ecological resilience” (*Climate Justice Alliance Just Transition Principles*, 2019, p. 2).

The Climate Justice Alliance (CJA) defines “just transition” in the following way:

Just Transition is a vision-led, unifying and place-based set of principles, processes and practices that build economic and political power to shift from an

extractive economy to a regenerative economy. This means approaching production and consumption cycles holistically and in a waste-free way. The transition itself must be just and equitable, redressing past harms and creating new relationships of power for the future through reparations. If the process of transition is not just, the outcome will never be. Just Transition describes both where we are going and how we get there (*Climate Justice Alliance Just Transition Principles*, 2019, p. 2).

CJA is asking local governments to align citywide actions with just transition principles.

CJA articulates a clear connection between our current economic paradigm and the crisis of climate change. “Climate disruption results from the ways our economy consumes resources and energy. Current economic policies and practices reward financial profit at the cost of driving unsustainable growth and the extraction of natural and human resources, undermining community resilience” (DeBacker, 2015, p.12).

Not only does CJA call for a transition, they articulate a vision of what is next by answering the question “*transition to what?*” CJA is asking for a transition to a regenerative economy. “In an extractive-based economy, the nature of work is exploitative, whereas in a regenerative economy, work is viewed as more cooperative in nature and focuses on establishing a deep democracy rooted in equity. This model can both transform this economy and stem the tide of climate change” (Córdova et al., 2022). The quantitative data displayed in Table 4.3 demonstrates this spread across the economy parent node in terms of attention to regenerative, transition, and extractive economic paradigms in all of the documents coded.

<b>Economy (Parent node)</b>		
Regenerative	25	39.68%
Transition	25	39.68%
Extractive	13	20.63%
<i>Total</i>	<i>63</i>	<i>100%</i>

**Table 4.3:** Distribution of economy child nodes

Local governments are specifically called into this vision of economic transition. “While climate change is a global problem, its effects are – and increasingly will be – felt locally in communities across the U.S. and the globe. Just as national and state-level action on climate change is required, local governments also have a critical role to play” (DeBacker, 2015, p.1). As Quinton Sankofa of Movement Generation, one of the organizations engaged with for this research, concisely stated: “Transition is inevitable. Justice is not.” Further, “the current economy is not forever because “economic growth that outpaces or erodes the capacity of ecosystems to regenerate...will become increasingly unstable and eventually unravel” (*Environmental Justice and The Alliance for a Just Transition: Grist for Climate Justice Planning, pg. 3*). The opportunity offered for city leaders is to ensure the transition is *just*.

Table 4.4 highlights qualitative data from economy parent codes that can support answering questions related to how a just transition could be seeded by municipal decision makers.

Quote	Source
Move money out of the extractive economy into the Just Transition work that frontline communities are building on the ground.	(Celebrating a Decade of Our Power: 2022 Annual Report, 2022, p. 20)
Expand access to living wages and safe jobs, quality schools and affordable housing, and safe and sustainable neighborhoods.	(Kelly, Martinez, & Hathaway-Williams, 2018, p. 3)
At multiple points and in multiple forms, ranging from co-ops to local currencies, community- held utilities and cooperative insurance structures, a better economy is within our reach. Drive local planning that can support the shift to more sustainable	(DeBacker et al, 2015, p. 50)

economies, thus removing the disincentives for those formations while ensuring strong accountability measures.	
Create local hiring and job training programs that provide pathways to living wage jobs in clean energy and other fields.	(Kelly et al, 2018, p. 4)
Use municipal bonds, public-private partnerships, and other strategies to finance energy efficiency, extreme weather, and climate change preparedness. Leverage federal, state, and county funds to buy out high-risk properties and help residents voluntarily move out of flood-prone areas. Partner with nonprofit groups and the private sector to increase residents’ access to insurance and loans to lower their risks in the face of extreme weather and flooding.	(Kelly et al, 2018, p. 5)
"Localize the economy" - particularly the food systems and energy - tie localization to policy incentives that stimulate new and sustainable forms of community-led economic activity that promote regional and global ecological balance.	(DeBacker et al, 2015, p.12)
Make equity, racial justice, and a just economy core goals of city resilience and climate action plans. Emphasize diversity in city hiring and remove biases in city planning that perpetuate inequities.	(Kelly et al, 2018, p. 3)
Capture and redirect disaster funding; reallocate resource flows for disaster preparedness, response, and recovery, ensuring that those resources stimulate “next economy” activity and build local wealth that can stabilize communities.	(DeBacker et al, 2015, p.12)

**Table 4.4:** Qualitative data from economy parent codes that can support answering the question how can a just transition be implemented at the municipal scale

Chapter 5 will explore these economy-focused findings in depth, and relate them specifically to the research questions posed by this thesis.

**Governance**

Models of governing dictate authority to lead the policy, actions, and affairs of a state, organization, or people. Local government elected officials and staff govern municipalities. The CJA members claim that governance is an essential ingredient of just transition because “just transition is both where we’re going and how we get there” (*Climate Justice Alliance Just Transition Principles*, 2019, p. 1). CJA are calling for models of deep democratic governance. “Deep democracy” is a fuller flavor of traditional democracy by going beyond procedures of inclusion to distributed, accessible, and powerful self-governance. “Just Transition *is* deep democracy in which workers and communities have control over the decisions that affect their daily lives” (*Climate Justice Alliance Just Transition Principles*, 2019, p. 3)

There are numerous examples within the governance-tagged texts that fell within the original child nodes of democracy and participation. In this case *democracy* means manners of governing that enable tangible power and ownership over decisions. *Participation* is one ingredient of democracy, but distinct because municipalities can have participation without democracy and self-determination. Text tagged with *participation* include references to influence and engagement in decision without a vote. Across the 49 excerpts tagged under *governance* there was a spread between democracy and participation, with democracy consisting of 59% of the tags across the two original child nodes.

<b>Governance (parent node)</b>		
Democracy	24	48.98%
Participation	17	34.69%

Frame*	5	10.20%
Regional*	3	6.51%
<i>Total</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>100%</i>

**Table 4.5:** Distribution of governance child nodes.

There were two emergent child nodes (see table 3.2 for definition), *frame* and *regional*, that were associated with the Governance node. *Frame* is defined as narrative structures that articulate a vision. For example, Movement Strategy Center articulated the need to “develop a narrative strategy that goes beyond crafting communications messages to address the frames underlying widely held concepts of nature, climate, and the economy. It is also important to assess which frames are catalytic in unifying the social-change community, and which will move decision makers and the public to action” (DeBacker, 2015, p.12). The logic to place this emergent theme under governance was merely that messaging is a critical function in the politics of governing. Beyond that, there is no clear reason why it could not also go under another parent node.

The *regional* emergent child node was defined by the calls in the data for bioregional and trans-local governance. “By reorganizing culture, identity, power, and governance to reflect bioregional or natural-system boundaries (e.g., watersheds) and regional or cross-jurisdictional boundaries, communities can enhance resilience and build systems that balance community, ecology, and economy” (DeBacker, 2015, p.12). The elevation of the role of regional collaboratives and governance in the data can inform how municipalities engage in just climate urbanisms.

Across the text tagged under *governance*, there is a clear undercurrent of reference to climate change and resiliency. CJA directly weaves together the critical role of deeply democratic modes of governing with the climate agenda. “The central objectives of any

resilience agenda include increasing the capacity for self-governance and rendering decision-making more democratic — ensuring that civic responsibility and leadership are widely distributed” (DeBacker, 2015, p.9)

The Center for Earth, Energy, Democracy discussed the high quality of solutions democratically agreed upon by those who will be most impacted by the solution. They claim that “climate change policies and preparedness strategies are most effective, and draw the most support from residents and community groups, if they are designed through inclusive processes and address the intersecting problems of racial, income, and environmental inequalities” (Kelly et al, 2018, p.3).

Table 4.6 highlights qualitative data from the governance parent codes that can support answering the question *how can this be seeded and implemented at the local scale*:

Quote	Source
We believe that those most vulnerable to the effects of climate change — particularly low-income communities and communities of color — must be at the heart of society’s efforts to build a resilient future in which ecosystems, human labor, and cultures are integrated into a thriving regenerative web of life.	(DeBacker et al, 2015, p. 2)
Increase communities’ capacity for self-governance, and promote democratic decision making. In many cities, community-led interventions are already transforming public planning processes. By connecting and aligning these efforts, it is possible to leverage change at a larger scale.	(DeBacker et al, 2015, p. 50)
Community controlled capital infrastructure.	<i>(Celebrating a Decade of Our Power: 2022 Annual Report, 2022, p. 27)</i>

Collaborate with community groups and build neighborhood capacity to shape and implement climate change solutions. Build community support for climate and resilience plans by raising awareness of climate change risks; partner with community groups to design effective climate strategies and public engagement processes that respect cultural protocols; and foster local leadership	(Kelly, 2018, p. 3)
Creating space in government planning for the voices of frontline communities has the potential to profoundly alter the quality of planning and policy decisions.	(Córdova et al., 2022, p.5)

**Table 4.6:** Qualitative data from governance parent codes that can support answering the question how can a just transition be seeded by municipal leaders

Chapter 5 will explore these governance findings in depth, and relate them specifically to the research questions posed by this thesis.

***Infrastructure***

Municipalities fund, build, regulate and maintain their built environment in large part through policy and planning processes. Exceptions to this would be cases of state or federal preemption, and when infrastructure is owned or operated by the private sector. Climate justice organizations are calling for community-owned and controlled infrastructure. What this means in practice for local leaders, is that infrastructure planning, policy, and design decisions are conducted using deeply democratic processes to lead to community-owned, distributed, and resilient community infrastructures.

<b>Infrastructure (parent node)</b>		
Built	19	52.78%
Human	13	36.11%
Both*	4	11.11%
<i>Total</i>	<i>36</i>	<i>100%</i>

**Table 4.7:** Distribution of infrastructure child nodes

Many CJA documents make a clear distinction between physical infrastructures or the *built* environment, and social infrastructures or the *human* networks and institutions that support social connectivity. Overall, the data includes 36 tags under *infrastructure*. However, there was a need to add an emergent node within the infrastructure parent, tagged as *both* and defined by the real and entangled relationship between the built environment and social infrastructure. An example of this in the text is “Jackson, Mississippi faced devastating floods, exacerbating an already failing water infrastructure system that rendered the drinking water unsafe. Cooperation Jackson was on the frontlines providing safe drinking water to residents. Jackson’s drinking water is temporarily restored as of this writing but Cooperation Jackson’s “Justice For Jackson ” campaign is now fighting the threats of water privatization, which would raise the cost of living and end local democratic control over Jackson’s water supply. Cooperation Jackson is also building community resilience by creating water catchment and filtration systems at community centers" (*Celebrating a Decade of Our Power: 2022 Annual Report*, 2022, p. 24). In this example, the failure of Jackson’s water infrastructure was compensated for through local movement building and the implementation of distributed water access through political power, thus highlighting the intimate relationship between built and social structures.

Movement Strategy Center claims that “to implement the strategies outlined above, we must align and expand movement infrastructure by: investing in the base; nurturing and

accelerating trans-local work; bridging movement divides and engaging key allies; and aligning more philanthropy with the effective strategy emerging from the field” (DeBacker, 2015, p.4). This type of intentional, political, movement building work is about developing “networks to build the connective tissue through which solutions, innovations, and momentum can travel” (DeBacker, 2015, p.4).

Table 4.8 highlights qualitative data from infrastructure parent codes that can support answering the question how can this be seeded and implemented at the local scale:

Quote	Source
<p>“UPROSE is building Sunset Park Solar, a community-owned, rooftop solar project which will generate 685 kWh at the Brooklyn Army Terminal in Sunset Park and provide benefits like community-control over management of the project and energy bill discounts to nearly 200 households and small businesses. UPROSE is currently exploring partnerships with new sites in Sunset Park for future community-owned solar.”</p>	<p><i>(Celebrating a Decade of Our Power: 2022 Annual Report, 2022, p. 26)</i></p>
<p>“Ensure access to affordable and clean transportation. Expand public transit; increase the use of low- and zero-emission rapid transit and electric buses; adopt regional transit solutions; provide affordable bike-share access, and make neighborhoods more pedestrian-friendly to increase access to economic opportunities and curb pollution.”</p>	<p>(Kelly et al, 2018, p. 4)</p>
<p>“Invest in resilient infrastructure and nature-based solutions. Invest in maintaining and building infrastructure that can withstand more extreme weather and</p>	<p>(Kelly et al, 2018, p. 4)</p>

<p>flood risks, curb carbon pollution, and provide economic and other benefits to residents. Prioritize infrastructure investments in communities facing the greatest needs. Update building and infrastructure codes and standards and expand natural areas and green infrastructure to reduce flood and extreme weather risks and create healthy and sustainable communities.”</p>	
<p>“Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agricultural systems (Nyéléni 2007).”</p>	<p><i>(US Food Sovereignty Alliance: Our History, 2018, p.1)</i></p>
<p>“As part of our Change the Rules Working Group strategy to create opportunities for political education and co-learning, we held a two-part hydrogen briefing series with members. These briefings were led by our members from New York, Michigan, and New Mexico who have been facing the rollout of hydrogen infrastructure policy proposals. In these briefings, we discussed the differences between the various types of hydrogen fuels and the effects that each may have on the lands, waters, and communities where they are proposed.”</p>	<p><i>(Celebrating a Decade of Our Power: 2022 Annual Report, 2022, p. 23)</i></p>
<p>“Support emergency preparedness and resilient disaster recovery. Work closely with community groups to prepare for more extreme weather emergencies and disasters in a changing climate, including heat waves. Improve land-use planning to reduce sprawling development in flood-prone areas. Invest in communication</p>	<p><i>(Kelly et al, 2018, p. 4)</i></p>

<p>and planning strategies to share critical information during emergencies and disasters, making vulnerable communities a priority.”</p>	
<p>“Support social cohesion and deeply connected communities. Support community ownership of resilience assets to strengthen local economies. Integrate equitable economic development strategies into resilience planning and respect and support racial and cultural diversity and informal community networks. Provide high-quality public spaces and access to quality education, health care, food, and the arts.”</p>	<p>(Kelly et al, 2018, p. 4 and 5)</p>
<p>“Build new climate resilient civic economic infrastructure. Build and scale new forms of political and civic participation and economic infrastructure. Examples include structured, community-driven climate action planning; municipal economic development that focuses on climate resilience; public management of local green utilities and energy production.”</p>	<p>(DeBacker et al, 2015, p.5)</p>
<p>“State and local Units to mobilize communities to advocate for expanded and more equitable flood infrastructure based on their specific needs. This includes approaching local elected officials, Congresspeople, Senators, and local Army Corps staff, as well as increasing awareness of flooding and infrastructural issues more broadly. Campaigns may include op-eds in local publications, social media campaigns, and other ways to spread the word (i.e., local signage, bumper stickers, letter-writing campaigns).”</p>	<p>(Beeman et al, 2021, p.9)</p>

**Table 4.8:** Qualitative data from infrastructure parent codes that can support answering the question how can a just transition be seeded by municipal leaders

Chapter 5 will explore these infrastructure findings in depth, and relate them specifically to the research questions posed by this thesis.

***Land***

Of the 12 documents coded for this analysis, 9.71% of the codes were tagged as *land*, which is defined as the part of the earth's surface that serves as the literal foundation of urban built environments. The second lowest number of codes was associated with this parent node, with one exception to this overarching finding. The Just Transition Alliance was explicit about the role of urban climate planners, or land use planners, in supporting a just transition within the context of land use decisions. The Just Transition Alliance stated that “zoning decisions are among the most important for affecting concentrated contamination and subsequent public health issues” (Córdova et al., 2022, p.4).

This organization also discussed the essential role played by people of color in the context of climate and environmental justice-related land use decision making. “Countless Indigenous, African American, Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Latin American, and Asian and Pacific Islander communities have endured and fought against land use policies and residential segregation that made possible the concentration of toxic waste and facility siting in their communities” (Córdova et al., 2022, p.1).

Urban planners and climate planners are explicitly implicated in the request from CJA to have communities develop climate action and resilience plans that address historic inequities and racial injustice. Inequities and injustice exacerbate climate change and other environmental risks in communities of color and low-income neighborhoods (Córdova et al., 2022):

<b>Land (parent node)</b>		
Property	4	23.53%

Undeveloped	3	17.65%
Siting	3	17.65%
Acquisition	2	11.76%
Planning	5	29.41%
<i>Total</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>100%</i>

**Table 4.9:** Distribution of land child nodes

Table 4.10 highlights qualitative data from land parent codes that can support answering the question how can this be seeded and implemented at the local scale:

<b>Quote</b>	<b>Source</b> (Document Title, Climate Justice Organization, page number)
Setting just and reasonable utility rates and ensuring that utilities provide adequate and reliable service to customers; authorizing and overseeing investments in energy resources such as power plants; reviewing and approving utility resource plans; Regulating private, investor-owned natural gas, electric, telephone, water and private sewer companies and; Approving new developments/facilities.	(Patterson, n.d.)
Advance equity in metro and regional land use; engage in innovative approaches, such as farmland compacts; make creative use of litigation; address planning barriers to sustainable development; and institute policies, which incentivize uses that drive adaptation and mitigation goals.	(Kelly et al, 2018, p. 4)
Support community land trusts and cooperatives to increase access to community-owned affordable housing and solar power.	(Kelly et al, 2018, p. 4)

<p>Official floodplain maps, used when making important decisions about zoning and property development, are outdated and omit critical information, in particular about potential climate impacts. Inaccuracies and omissions from FEMA’s dataset likely perpetuate the under protection of high-exposure, high-vulnerability communities.</p>	<p>(Beeman et al, 2021, p. 6)</p>
<p>Southwest Workers Union (SWU) in Texas has broken ground on the first phase of their new Healing &amp; Resiliency Center. This resiliency hub will provide a home to different social movements that need a place to work and organize. In addition, this ecologically designed building will also serve as an emergency location for the community during climate disasters.</p>	<p>(<i>Celebrating a Decade of Our Power: 2022 Annual Report</i>, 2022, p. 25)</p>
<p>Zoning decisions are among the most important for affecting concentrated contamination and subsequent public health issues.</p>	<p>(Córdova et al., 2022, p.4)</p>
<p>Key avenue through which planners can engage in climate justice action is to assist with creating measures to specify environmental impacts of proposed development projects presented to government planning and zoning commissions.</p>	<p>(Córdova et al., 2022, p. 5)</p>

**Table 4.10:** Qualitative data from land parent codes that can support answering the question how can a just transition be seeded by municipal leaders

Chapter 5 will explore these findings regarding *land* in depth, and relate them specifically to the research questions posed by this thesis.

***Municipal scale***

This parent node is distinct from the first four nodes. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the purpose of this code was to capture any mentions of cities, towns, and villages in the analyzed documents that were *not* being captured by the economic, governance, land, and infrastructure parent nodes.

<b>Municipal scale (parent node)</b>		
Financing*	4	40.00%
Climate change	3	30.00%
Regional *	3	30.00%
Power	0	0%
Race	0	0%
<i>Total</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>100%</i>

**Table 4.11:** Distribution of municipal scale child nodes

Seventy percent of *municipal scale* coded text did not fall explicitly within the pre-identified child nodes of *climate change*, *race*, and *power*. Of the remaining 30%, 100% referenced *climate change* and there was no explicit mention of *race* and *power*. A discussion of these findings occurs in Chapter 5.

The 70% of child nodes that were emergent were related to regional collaboration between municipal governments and local financing and tagged under *regional* and *financing*. Text coded as *regional* related to the clear interconnectedness of communities to one another in any given geographic area. Examples include “these mayors understand that no city is an island unto itself, especially in a changing climate” (Kelly et al, 2018, p.1) and “because cities are connected to rural areas through trade and ecosystems, we must rethink the relationships of cities to the larger “bioregions” in which they are embedded” (DeBacker, 2015, p.16).

*Financing* was tagged in this category in two inverse ways. Either as an enabler, or as a barrier to just climate resilience action. 75% of the text coded with financing was related to the barrier of lack of funding. For example, “communities who cannot meet cost-sharing requirements [to receive federal Army Corps funds] may request funding from nongovernmental organizations, or other funding sources, but there is no guarantee that they will be able to obtain the funds they need. As a result, projects in low-wealth communities may fail to advance because local governments lack the necessary funding” (Beeman et al, 2021, p. 21). The example of financing as enabling community resilience is reference to 2013 Hurricane Sandy federal funding that did not require local cost-share partners (Beeman et al, 2021, p. 40). Chapter 5 will explore these *municipal scale* findings in depth, and relate them specifically to the research questions posed by this thesis.

## **Conclusions**

In conclusion, the data show that climate justice organizations are asking for deep democratic participation in transitioning towards regenerative economic models. The data is also clear that municipal governments have a critically important role in shaping a resilient economy. The "data" here are the collective demands and agenda of the CJA. The following chapter will discuss this data and explore recommendations for what these data tangibly mean for municipal praxis that is in alignment with the lived experience and future needs of those most impacted by the climate crisis and frontline movements for climate justice.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter responds to the data and discusses findings to the research questions. In order to fully respond to the research questions, discussion and supplemental thinking is essential. The primary audience of 25% of the 12 documents analyzed was city leaders and planners. 75% of the remaining resources were for different and broader audiences and thus did not filter for implementation potential at the city, town, and village scale. This filtering and analysis is the primary purpose of research and explains the inadequacy of the findings alone in fully responding to the research questions.

Chapter 4 demonstrates that there are clear ways municipal governments can support just climate urbanisms. National Climate Justice Alliance members (CJA) collectively and clearly articulate a vision of community resilience that requires a reshaping of economic and political systems. This chapter will discuss the findings across nodes through the lens of emergent themes. In moving from the foundational question of *what are climate justice organizations asking of cities, towns, and villages* to the essential question of *how can this be seeded and implemented at the local scale*, this chapter discusses four overarching, unifying, and intersectional themes that have applications across nodes. These four emergent and intersectional themes for practice are: just economic transition, deep democracy, social resilience, and cross scale actions.

### 5.1 Just economic transition

As discussed in Chapter 4, CJA members are calling for a just transition to a regenerative economy. In other words, to *equitably* address climate change, municipal decision makers must grapple with explicitly economic questions. Collectively, the data carefully drew out the relationship between our current economic paradigm and human caused climate change. Climate solutions and strategies within the current paradigm of an extractive economy have an

“underlying assumption that a solution can and must be found *without* transitioning from ever-increasing industrial development because that notion is either inconceivable or undesirable” (DeBacker et al, 2015, p.24). The abolitionist framework presented in chapter 2 provides a pathway for removing the assumption that the way things are is in fact the way they must be.

Further, the findings outlined in chapter 4 align very much with the scholarly thinking on just climate urbanism presented in chapter 2. Scholars call for a critical examination on capital in the city. Ultimately, if capital is the driving force behind climate solutions, the outcome could still lead us to a “green, clean economy” but that does in no way mean that those burdened by our current energy system will not also be burdened by a “clean energy” economy.

By presenting a just transition as a pathway forward to achieve this shared goal of shifting from extractive economies to regenerative ones, it logically follows that “any meaningful action on climate change will require an economic transition — a significant shift in the economic paradigm from an extractive to a regenerative economy — one that restores our connection to place and regenerates (rather than degrades) natural and human resources” (DeBacker et al, 2015, p. 12). Local governments are essential players in creating a new economy for the new climate reality. “That transition includes localization economies, building economic alternatives, and connecting climate resilience to economic justice” (DeBacker et al, 2015, p. 4).

The data presented in chapter 4 is clear, we need a just transition. The question that this thesis is concerned with however is what is the unique role of municipalities in ushering a just economy. Pathways to a People’s Economy offers a four pronged policy framework for government that contains a suite of concrete solutions. In analyzing the policy framework from a

municipal government lens there are several core areas of opportunity for municipalities. These opportunities are highlighted in table 5.1 below.

<p><b>Workpases:</b> Worker owned cooperatives that build community control and community wealth</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Develop education and technical assistance program for worker cooperatives</li> <li>● Produce data and research about work cooperatives</li> <li>● Financially support worker cooperatives</li> <li>● Create public procurement incentives for work cooperatives</li> <li>● Develop corporate structures and incentives that encourage growth <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Local governments can advocate to create state work cooperative statue</li> <li>○ Create tax incentives for worker coops</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Housing:</b> Community land trusts, limited equity co-ops, and resident ownership</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Resource and incentivize community-owned and democratically-controlled housing solutions</li> <li>● Preserve existing affordable housing and protect residents from involuntary displacement</li> <li>● Democratize the housing finance system by enable Public Banking and community funding models such as Permanent Real Estate Co-operatives, Community Initial Public Offerings (IPOs), and other collective platforms</li> </ul>
<p><b>Financing:</b> Stronger regulatory environment for private banks and these banks are divested from extractive industries</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Divest municipal pensions from extractive industries and invest in community based and community wealth building initiatives</li> <li>● Protect people who interact with the financial marketplace through education programs</li> <li>● Create ad strengthen banks, community capital vehicles, and financial institutions that prioritize and the communities they serve (such as green banks)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Restoration:</b> Policy actions are explicitly oriented towards environmental sustainability without losing sight of the environmental and climate justice implications.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Restore Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination through procedural justice practices partnering with tribes</li> <li>● Ensure community-governance and care of collective resources</li> <li>● Divest from climate destruction and reinvest in climate resiliency</li> <li>● Create green jobs for the people</li> <li>● Power communities with energy democracy</li> </ul>

- Build regenerative agriculture systems
- Prevent disaster capitalism and commit to just recovery

**Table 5.1:** Policy framework for solidarity economy. (*Source: Pathways to a People's Economy, n.d.*)

As discussed in chapter 2, the role of land in maintaining urban inequities is clearly established in the academic discourse. Given the significant role of municipalities in controlling land use decisions, land presents a critical leverage point of enacting climate justice at the municipal scale. As noted in Figure 4.1 in chapter 4, only 9.71% of the codes were tagged as *land*, a category that included references to property, land use, and siting. While there were fewer explicit calls for land use oriented strategies in the CJA text, land use is a critically important leverage point in the role of municipalities in operationalizing a just transition. Given the critical relationship between the capitalist accumulation within property in our current legal system and the terrain of injustice in urban environments (see for example ref and ref in chapter, who outline this relationship in depth), this is an opportunity for city decision to seeded climate justice priorities.

Supporting urban commons, defined as xxx, offers one concrete pathway forward for municipal decision makers in operationalizing the demands of climate justice movements at the local scale. Matt Hern argues that “gentrification is endemic to every city” (Hern, 2016, p.11). Critical urban and marxist scholars argue that gentrification is capitalism at the scale of the urban (for example see Rachel Brahinsky’s “Death of the City ”). The core purpose of Hern's work is to question whether the urban area has to be governed by capital, or if it could in fact be governed by people (Hern, 2016). This question is echoed by CJA members as they call for the need to “support healthy, inclusive development and implement anti-displacement strategies that

improve city livability without serially pushing out longtime residents with low socio-economic mobility” (Kelly et al, 2018, p. 4).

Supporting notions of urban community is one emergent solution in this space. In *Resilience, Reciprocity and Ecological Economics: Northwest Coast Sustainability* Ronald L. Trosper wrote:

The world is in the midst of a change in thinking about economic and social policy in general, and environmental policy in particular. Climate change is showing that the world depends upon a common pool resource, the atmosphere. Other common pool resources, such as fresh water and forests, are also important. Simply put, the world is discovering that people depend upon these common pool resources more than they believed... How should people organize themselves when they depend upon a common pool resource? We need to study examples of peoples who have developed complex and productive systems using a common pool resource as the fundamental source of wealth (Trosper, 2009, p.4).

Discourse around the urban commons provides a framework in which to implement the calls of CJA to support “community ownership of resilience assets” (Kelly et al, 2018, p. 4 and 5). Sheila Foster brought notions of the urban commons to the fore in the discourse of urban land. Foster critiques the dichotomy of either privatization of a resource or a central government control of that resource. She develops a role for government that enables the collective management of shared resources in the urban commons (Foster, 2011).

Marx and Engels call for the abolition of private property and the public use of land (Marx, 1848). The U.S. legal system was designed to “prioritize the protection of property over human health and well-being, making it difficult to challenge policies and economic actions that harm vulnerable communities” (DeBacker et al, 2015, p.15). Drawing on the systems theory outlined in chapter 2, while the narratives around property in the U.S. center themes of equal opportunity, we know that “purposes are deducted from behavior, not rhetoric or stated goals”

(Meadows, 2008, p. 14) and “an important function of almost every system is to ensure its own perpetuation (Meadows, 2008, p. 15).” Using this lens, we can begin to explain why our current system of property ownership continues to disproportionately benefit white people (Levy, 2022).

Digging deep into the question of the role of local governments in actualizing the vision of climate justice organizations locally leads to the trough of questioning the very nature of private property itself. In order to seed the demands of climate justice organizations in municipal climate policy municipalities must fundamentally rethink their relationship to private property. Building an urban commons is one concrete mechanism for doing this. Echoing Krueckeberg’s question of distributive justice: “to whom do things belong?” (Krueckeberg, 1995). Hern states:

Considering displacement is to ask who deserves access to land and why, and those answers, or at least those questions, strike me as right at the heart of what a city should be for. Cities should be setting us free, and in many ways and for many of us, they do. But all cities are built on colonial plunder, and most, certainly those in my part of the world [North America], have been built on the back of racist dominations and unearned privilege (Hern, 2016, p.15).

Patricia Perkins discusses the relationships between climate justice, commons, and degrowth. Perkins critiques the current degrowth discourse but claims that “degrowth movements, when they explicitly prioritize equity, can help to focus activism for climate justice and sustainable livelihoods” (Perkins, 2019, p. 183). Perkins continues by saying that “economic growth nearly always heightens inequities, since in the absence of countervailing policies and institutions, wealth begets more wealth and political power in a positive-feedback cycle” (Perkins, 2019, p. 183).

## **5.2 Deep Democracy**

As discussed in Chapter 4, the CJA members are calling for municipal leaders to actively support the building of deep democracy. Changing governance by building in more democratic

structures and practices is a powerful leverage point municipal leaders have in supporting a just transition. In the words of the NAACP, the role of engagement with people is not to be transactional but to build real power (*Unleashing the Power of the People: Lessons on Public Engagement for Environmental and Climate Justice*, n.d.). This requires decision makers to understand how power shows up in their community. Marie Kennedy describes a spectrum of progressive planning practice that ranges from advocacy to transformation. According to Kennedy, what makes planning transformative is to have a focus on power, its redistribution, and the “raising of political consciousness” (Kennedy, 1997, p.99) She goes on to claim that “successful transformative community planning means wielding our planning tools in a way that puts real control in the hands of people most affected” (Kennedy, 1997, p.99) by the outcomes of that planning project.

All people 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 (*Climate Justice Alliance Just Transition Principles*, 2019, p. 4).

In, *From citizen participation to government participation*, Mees discusses the shifting role of government from regulating and steering to collaborative and responsive government (2019). Mees identifies a gap in the research around an empirical understanding of what the role of government is facilitating and enabling (Mees et al., 2019). The stated demands of frontline climate justice communities offer a response to at least part of this question, in that they illuminate what is not being done at present. For example, the Center for Earth, Energy, and

Democracy said “collaborate with community groups and build neighborhood capacity to shape and implement climate change solutions. Build community support for climate and resilience plans by raising awareness of climate change risks; partner with community groups to design effective climate strategies and public engagement processes that respect cultural protocols; and foster local leadership” (Kelly et al, 2018, p. 3).

In the city sustainability field, the Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN) has been at the forefront of supporting local governments in shifting power through climate planning. USDN co-developed a framework for shifting power through climate planning with local governments which they call “the Nexus guidance.” This guidance is designed for practitioners who are working to fundamentally transform the traditional approach to climate action planning and practice. It focuses on altering the process in which local government approaches climate work and centers on two main objectives (1) acknowledging the inequitable history that designed governance in North America and (2) actively, intentionally and iteratively working to shift power throughout the entire climate planning or policy process to people in the community with particularity on prioritizing Black and brown residents. This program emphasizes the role of restorative justice (see table 2.1) in achieving climate justice.

The Movement Strategy Center stresses the need to “develop formal and institutionalized venues” for shifting the power embedded in governance to people. Examples included “participatory budgeting, neighborhood councils, and increased authority for existing resident advisory groups.” They said these examples can “create “windows” into what’s possible through direct experience of shared governing” (DeBacker et al, 2015, p. 50).

The finding that community power and democracy support just climate urbanism is supported by the literature. The climate justice literature is fundamentally about inclusion of the

people impacted by climate change leading climate solutions. Democracy is the mechanism for ensuring this. Additionally, systems theory offers yet another perspective on the role of democratic governments in resiliency. As systems theorist Donella Meadows claims, “the ability to self-organize is the strongest form of system resilience” (Meadows, 2008, p. 159).

### ***5.3 Social Resilience***

Abolitionist geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore, introduced in chapter 2, describes abolition as interpersonal (Gilmore, 2007). Climate justice at the municipal scale is also interpersonal. The data show that the infrastructure prioritized by CJA is not only the built environment, but also social infrastructure. As noted in Figure 4.7, 47.22% of the text coded for infrastructure fell under the definition of *human infrastructure* and 11.11% was defined as *both*.

As described in chapter 2, social infrastructure are systems that support people - healthcare, childcare, job training, etc. Social infrastructure is not inherently resilient. What makes social infrastructure resilient is the infrastructure's ability to be adaptable in order to withstand stressors. Climate change and injustice are both stressors. Social resilience requires climate justice.

The question then becomes, what are ingredients of social resilience and what is the role of municipalities fostering it. Embedded in the idea of resilience is the notion of “bouncing back” after a critical stressor event. Bouncing back implies bouncing back to a certain benchmark: bounce back to what? CJA claims that as a collective we need to “move beyond fossil fuels, build local economic infrastructure, and redefine “the good life” (DeBacker et al, 2015, p. 5) This idea of “redefining the good life” strikes at the very core of resilience in the context of a just transition.

This idea of “bouncing forward” to a redefined idea of “the good life” is also supported by thinkers adrienne maree brown and bell hooks. In *Pleasure Activism*, adrienne maree brown asks the question *what is enough?* (brown, 2019) This simple question is at the core of building post-capitalist local economies. In *All About Love: New Visions*, Bell Hooks emphasizes the role of centering simplicity (hooks, 2000). Knowing what is enough, which will be different across populations, and living simply enable social resilience to bounce to a place that supports human flourishing and ecological sustainability.

The role of local gov in supporting social resiliency. Drawing on Klingenberg's arguments (discussed in chapter 2) that there are clear spatial sites where scholars have identified as critical building blocks of social infrastructure: places of worship, public open spaces, and schools. A significant proportion of these locations are traditionally municipally managed (namely parks and schools). Thus a critical role of municipal governments in building “social cohesion and deeply connected communities” is to increase these public sites where social infrastructure can be produced (Kelly et al, 2018, p. 4 and 5).

Additionally, municipal decision makers have an opportunity to acknowledge, engage, and fund existing climate resilient civic and economic infrastructures such as mutual aid networks. Often, it is the informal networks of mutual aid and solidarity that support communities in disaster. Arguably, municipal governments have an opportunity to direct resources to these networks.

For example, mutual aid that could receive municipal government support in just climate urbanist futures. Local governments have a critical role to play in supporting human infrastructure by both investing in public spaces and funding community based mutual aid, especially in disaster preparedness context.

## 5.4 Cross Scale Actions

Aligning across scales not only supports just climate urbanisms, it enables. This was emphasized both explicitly and implicitly in the data collected for this study. Throughout the data, there is not only a strong emphasis on local action but also on regionalism. A just transition requires cities to approach “production and consumption cycles holistically and in a waste-free way” (*Climate Justice Alliance Just Transition Principles*, 2019, p. 1). This will require municipalities to “localize the economy, particularly the food systems and energy, tie localization to policy incentives that stimulate new and sustainable forms of community-led economic activity that promotes regional and global ecological balance” (DeBacker et al, 2015, p.12). This re-localization of systems on which humans depend is an essential thread in the fabric of transition to a regenerative economy. In other words, cities must look beyond their legal boundaries at how whole regions can reconnect to one another to build an ecologically sustainable future (see DeBacker et al, 2015 and Fürst et al., 2013).

Not only is CJA clear in their call for a local (regional) economy, but they also provide clarity on how regional governance and collaboration might be bounded. “Because cities are connected to rural areas through trade and ecosystems, we must rethink the relationships of cities to the larger “bioregions” in which they are embedded.” (DeBacker et al, 2015, p.16) One longer answer to this challenges is “people-centered bioregionalism — efforts to reorganize culture, identity, power, and governance to reflect bioregional and regional boundaries; and ensure broad, democratic participation in large-scale planning and decision making” (DeBacker et al, 2015, p.16).

In a regenerative economy, ecological boundaries and regional partnerships will provide new ways of seeing our communities and governing our lives and livelihoods. “By reorganizing

culture, identity, power, and governance to reflect bioregional or natural-system boundaries (e.g., watersheds) and regional or cross-jurisdictional boundaries, communities can enhance resilience and build systems that balance community, ecology, and economy” (DeBacker et al, 2015, p.4).

Cities, towns, and villages are ready to work collaboratively. “Mayors understand that no city is an island unto itself, especially in a changing climate” and it is clear that “creating a just and sustainable economy in one place can improve lives in nearby communities” (Kelly et al, 2018, p. 1). Through understanding that working regionally is an essential way to seeded climate justice at the municipal scale, the importance of rural America is elevated. To have just climate urbanism, we need just bioregions (James & Cato, 2014). We need collaborative governance at the regional scale (Calzadilla, 2017). I argue that this clear call for regional planning and governance elevates the importance of rural communities in climate urbanisms. Moving from cities as the sites of capital accumulation in a capitalist system to a bioregional regenerative economy means that rural communities are given the respect they've always deserved.

By elevating the critical role of regional economic collaboration, the importance of rural communities becomes extraordinarily apparent. Today’s climate policy context provides an example of how policy isn’t currently shaped for rural areas. This is exemplified in the following quote from *Turning the Tide: Advancing Racial Justice in Federal Flood Insurance Projects*:

Because the Corps of Engineers has a formula that they use based on economic impact, and so if you are in a rural area or you are in a sparsely populated area, you get much less points than if you are in an urban area. But we keep trying to explain to the Corps, that if you don’t take care of some of these rural areas south of New Orleans and this region, you are going to be dealing with having to protect the center of the city, you know, with a 30-foot wall. They are learning, but not quite fast enough (Beeman et al, 2021, p.5)

Additionally, there is a need to advocate for vertical integration at the state and federal levels. As discussed in previous chapters, local government authority is subject to state

government discretion<sup>9</sup> (Briffault, 1990). States have the legal authority to alter local power and the jurisdictions themselves. (Foster, 2011) In practice, municipalities wield substantial power in many states. The entire premise of this research was to simplify and codify the typical “power” and function of municipal governments in order to make sense of their role in implementing the national agenda of the Climate Justice Alliance. However, to ignore the limitation of local legal power in the project would be to overlook both a barrier and opportunity for just climate urbanisms to unfold.

Advocacy to other levels of government is one way that cities, towns, and villages can support a just transition in solidarity with climate justice organization. This research has revealed that climate justice organizations are calling for community owned and controlled infrastructures, but this node is deeply intertwined with governance and the call for collaborative governance and authentic democracy. Across sectors, water, energy, transportation, food, and social, CJA offered specific solutions many of which can be implemented at the local scale and many of which require collective local government action. For example, advocacy to the state Public Utilities Commission to allow for policies like net metering that enable energy democracy and distributed energy like community-owned rooftop solar and wind projects. This regulatory reform approach can be done in tandem with organizing to shift to alternatives like municipalization or energy cooperatives. The scales discussed thus far reach beyond the urban, but it is also critically important to note the role the sub-urban, or the neighborhood and street level, plays in actualizing climate justice. These sub-urban landscapes are the sites where social resiliency unfolds and plays a critical role in building democracy in municipalities.

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<sup>9</sup> 233 See Richard Briffault, *Our Localism: Part I-The Structure of Local Government Law*, 90 COLUM. L. REV. 1, 15, 23 (1990) (noting that local governments are technically creatures of their state government and enjoy delegated power subject to the authority of the state to amend or abolish local powers and the localities themselves).

Non-government organizations (NGOs) have a critical role to play in supporting municipal leaders in implementing the findings of this research. NGOs play an essential role creating a scaffolding for urban sustainability movement building and capacity building. There is an entire ecosystem of urban climate NGOs - from National League of Cities (NLC), Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN), C40, Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI), to Climate Mayors - are all providing essential infrastructure for the field of urban sustainability to evolve. It is a critically important city facing organizations that form a “network-of-networks” strategy to effectively work towards strategic collective impact. “Networks to build the connective tissue through which solutions, innovations, and momentum can travel.” (DeBacker et al, 2015, p.v) Three direct examples directly from the text *Pathways to Resilience:*

*Transforming Cities in a Changing Climate.* While all three of this calls to NGOs come from one text, there are four authors in this text so these calls reflect a rich collaboration and thinking:

- “Retrofit systems of education and training to meet the changing needs; bolster and restructure underutilized education resources, such as community colleges and extension programs; and support local, regional and national learning communities among existing formations (for example, National League of Cities, local elected officials of color, American Planning Association) to build capacity for undertaking structural approaches to resilience” (DeBacker et al, 2015, p.50).
- “P2R participants called for a policy inventory to generate a database of successful efforts, including model climate action plans that are strong from a social justice standpoint, so that groups with varied capacities can both contribute to the inventory and draw from it as it evolves” (DeBacker et al, 2015, p.14).

- “Nurture and accelerate trans-local work. Support existing networks and launch new regional, national, and issue-based networks that can support learning, solution building, and shared strategy development. Resources are needed for convening, peer-to-peer learning, mapping, and leadership development, as well as to develop platforms for communications and alignment” (DeBacker et al, 2015, p.17)

Especially in the context of Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding, NGOs are creating an essential scaffolding environment in which municipal leaders can effectively act on climate. They will continue to play an essential role in supporting a just transition. NGOs also have a role to play in supporting the vision, framing, and narrative theme that emerged through the research. *Frame* was an emergent node in the research (see Table 4.5). While this is not an outlier per se (because it came up in two separate researches), it does not fit neatly into any of the four core findings discussed above. It is notable enough that it warrants discussion here.

Donella Meadows describes the role of *vision* by saying “a vision articulates a future that someone deeply wants, and does it so clearly and compellingly that it summons up the energy, agreement, sympathy, political will, creativity, resources, or whatever to make that vision happen” (Meadows, 1999, p.3). Movement Strategy Center echoes this sentiment by articulating the need to “develop a narrative strategy that goes beyond crafting communications messages to address the frames underlying widely held concepts of nature, climate, and the economy. It is also important to assess which frames are catalytic in unifying the social-change community, and which will move decision makers and the public to action” (DeBacker, 2015, p.12). Systems theory explains this by identifying information flows as an effective leverage point because it

creates “a new loop, delivering feedback to a place where it wasn’t going before” (Meadows, 2008, p.157). There is the critical role of narrative strategy in catalyzing action.

## **Conclusion**

Through the data collection and analysis described in this thesis, municipal governments have a suite of actions that fall within the frame of just transition that they can take to align their legal power with the demands of the climate justice movement. As Emily N. Johnston says in her essay *Loving a Vanishing World*, “we did not intend this harm, but we have partaken of it: given the reign of neoliberalism and the lies of the fossil fuel industry, living a social being is almost required that we partake.” (*All We Can Save*, pg 261). Through this statement, Johnston artfully removes that shame and guilt and stifles action while also embedding the accuracy of our shared culpability. We all have a role to play and through the lens of climate action, local governments can open the gates to a better world instead of being the gatekeepers of the hurtful past. Chapter 6, recommendations, distilled the findings and discussion into discrete and succinct “municipal action pathways” that offer both catalytic and longer term actions for municipal governments in seeding climate justice.

## Chapter 6: Recommendations

This thesis confronts the heartbreak of status quo climate urbansims and outlines a world of possibilities when it comes to addressing the climate crisis and its impact on U.S. communities. Turning to face the injustice of climate change is psychologically distressing on a good day and utterly heart wrenching on a bad one. This project is purposefully interdisciplinary, in order to lovingly surround the painful truths about our broken world with values of courage, solidarity, and justice to inspire showing up anyways.

In conversation with podcast host Krista Tippit in June 2022, adrienne maree brown described a world “so miraculous and incredible” that it’s worth our “whole life effort” to fight for (Tippit, 2022). brown calls us to be at “peace with what is, which might be that we’re not willing to change ” (Tippit, 2022). Within the collection of essays entitled *All We Can Save: Truth, Courage, and Solutions for the Climate Crisis*, Emily N. Johnston offers “in the world of your imagination, can you see children living who might have drowned, stable communities that might have burned, species hanging on - and understand those are things to fight for, for the rest of our lives? We can rejoin the web of life. We do not have to be its destroyer. But our last best chance is now, and countless tasks lie ahead of us” (Johnson, Wilkinson, 2021, p.264). In *All About Love: New Visions*, bell hooks reminded us why “we want to live in a culture where love can flourish” (hooks, 2000). These thinkers are just a few of the many who can ground us in the imagination of futures where we can all thrive.

There is no equitable climate action without social justice. Due to systemic racism and inequities the climate crisis is affecting communities of color and low income communities disproportionately. This thesis has sought to argue that U.S. municipal scale climate action can not be removed from the racialized politics inherent in the U.S. and embedded in place. As cities,

towns and villages continue to offer an essential scale for addressing the crisis of a changing climate, government actors within the municipalities must contend with inequitable paradigms that maintain power in urban environments and strip communities of color of their dignity and agency. By contending with and addressing these underlying paradigms, the path of transformative and racial climate urbanisms can emerge.

The municipal scale offers an essential leverage point to unlock the potential of just climate futures. This thesis fills a gap in the current research on the role of cities in equitability addressing the climate crisis from the perspective of National Climate Justice Alliance (CJA) members. The data around specific solutions elevated by CJA offers pathways away from status quo urbanism towards just urban futures.

The data presented in this thesis demonstrated that to equitably solve climate change, municipal decision makers and leaders need to invest in a post-capitalist local economies. Practically operationalizing climate justice at the municipal scale requires investments in a just transition, deeply democratic local governance, investment in social resilience, and working across scales for vertical policy integration. This chapter recommends next steps for applied research specific recommendations for municipalities across economy, governance, social resilience, and collaboration across scales.

## **6.1 Recommendations for applied research**

There are numerous opportunities to build on this research and address barriers that emerged throughout the findings. Some of these opportunities are enumerated below:

1. The methods designed to look at the National Climate Justice Organization can be adapted and applied at any scale from neighborhood, municipal scale, state, or sub-national regions (such as the southeast, etc). There are networks of grassroots and

community-based climate and environmental justice groups at all of these scales across the country. The research could take the form of practical applied research for practitioners to have on hand or it be another thesis or academic piece.

2. A notable barrier to local governments creating both an enabling environment for solidarity economies that was not adequately addressed in this thesis is around how municipalities will fund their operating and capital budgets within a climate justice framework. Municipalities are primarily financed through property taxes. The field needs to ask: *What are alternative modes for municipal finance other than relying on private property? Does this have to be a barrier? Can municipalities still get the funding they need through property taxes if a property is communally owned?*
3. This research was designed to go deep on the written resources that already exist. However, there is an opportunity to ground the findings in conversations with climate justice leaders. There is an opportunity to supplement this research with conversations with municipal leaders committed to climate justice as well as frontline climate justice organizations to ground truth the findings explored here and adapt based on their experience today.

## **6.2 Just Transition Framework for U.S. Municipal Governments**

By analyzing the resources and demands of the CJA this research is broad by design. However the implementation of these findings must be deeply placed-based. Most of the scholarship on dominant narratives of climate urbanism are calling for future making to happen at the margins. The margins in this project refers to frontline and marginalized groups. Negotiating and making way for just urban futures at the margins means both centering the marginalized and also the localized scale of shaping.

Given the critically important role of localized economies and governance in actualizing climate justice, the nuances of how this is implemented will be extraordinary place specific. The critical importance of place-based application of the findings of this research. There is not one size fits all set of strategies. The findings of this research can serve as guiding principles for place based climate action authentically listening to those most impacted. “These climate justice activists insist on the centrality of the “place-based leadership of peoples with the longest-living knowledge of Earth’s natural ecological systems” (Córdova et al., 2022, p.4).

Looking at localities from the national scale inevitably means that this project makes broad strokes about the implications of national climate justice literature for cities. Each municipality will have a unique mix or organizations who are asking for place-based and highly nuanced things. This thesis provided a general framework for municipal leaders to act in solidarity and in accordance with frontline communities. It is the responsibility of each municipal leader to add depth to this framework and give it local roots. The framework can even be a tool for approaching community based partners and organizations and asking to collaboratively shape the core questions and policy examples to the local context.

**6.3 Municipal pathways for just climate urbanisms**

This research was intentionally designed to provide municipal staff and elected officials with seeds of policy strategies to be courageous, effective, and innovative leaders for a just, resilient, and sustainable future. Tables 6.1 - 6.5 seek to summarize a set of tangible tools for municipal leaders who wish to support an intentional shift to just climate urban futures:

Implementation pathways	Action guide for municipalities
Catalytic actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Resource mutual aid networks that already exist</li> <li>➤ Lead by example: support transformative justice professional development for municipal staff</li> </ul>

	➤ See “ Policy framework for solidarity economy” in 5.1
Long term actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Transition city land into the commons</li> <li>➤ See “ Policy framework for solidarity economy” in 5.1</li> </ul>

**Figure 6.1:** Economic transition municipal action pathways for just climate urbanisms

Implementation pathways	Action guide for municipalities
Catalytic actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ MOUs with community-based organizations</li> <li>➤ Citizen advisory committees</li> <li>➤ Open planning forums with citizen polling</li> </ul>
Long term actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Community driven planning</li> <li>➤ Consensus buildings</li> <li>➤ Participatory action research</li> <li>➤ Participatory budgeting</li> <li>➤ Cooperatives</li> </ul>

**Figure 6.2:** Democracy municipal action pathways for just climate urbanisms  
(*The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership, 2022*)

Implementation pathways	Action guide for municipalities
Catalytic actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Resources sites of social resilience utilizing the “resilience hub” (Urban sustainability Directors Network, n.d.) model</li> </ul>
Long term actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Invest in increasing site nodes of social resilience</li> <li>➤ Finance mutual aid</li> </ul>

**Figure 6.3:** Social Resilience municipal action pathways for just climate urbanisms

Implementation pathways	Action guide for municipalities
Catalytic actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Support existing networks and launch new regional networks that can support learning, solution building, and shared strategy development.</li> <li>➤ Conduct food systems planning at the bioregional scale</li> <li>➤ Invest in stormwater management at the bioregional scale</li> <li>➤ Transportation solutions that active the potential of the suburb as a site for housing stock acceleration focused on public transit oriented development</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Build relationships with state municipal leagues to collectively articulate policy positions to the state legislatures</li> <li>➤ Join Federal Advocacy committees through the National League of Cities</li> </ul>
Long term actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Implement food, transit, and resilience solutions that are collectively agreed upon at the regional scale.</li> </ul>

**Figure 6.4:** Vertical municipal action pathways for just climate urbanisms

Urbanism is a catch basin for cultural features. Just climate urbanisms offer a pathway for culture change that paves that way to alternative pathways for climate changed cities. CJA members collectively paint a picture that both critiques the status quo and concretely describes what bold and transformational change might look like at the urban scale. Through developing governance structures that support community ownership, foster democratic participation, and unlock collective power, cities can invest in solutions that build post-capitalist local economies.

“We can let them kill this beautiful world - or we can get the beautiful work of making space for a decent future” (Johnson, et al, 2021, p. 265).

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