BEATRICE AND ARTHUR MINDEN SYMPOSIUM ON THE ENVIRONMENT

CUTTING CARBON IN CANADA

2021 REPORT



School of the Environment UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

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OVERVIEW OF THE BEATRICE AND ARTHUR MINDEN SYMPOSIUM ON THE ENVIRONMENT: CUTTING CARBON IN CANADA

"Climate change affects everything, and connects everything." – Dr. Steve Easterbrook, in the opening remarks for the 2021 Minden Symposium: Cutting Carbon in Canada

The Beatrice and Arthur Minden Symposium on the Environment: Cutting Carbon in Canada was held virtually over four days from November 8 – 11, 2021. The event was a multidisciplinary series that hosted sessions on science, policy, social justice, and system change. It featured keynote talks, panel discussions, and interactive workshops addressing the challenge of getting to zero carbon emissions from a wide range of perspectives. The schedule was organized each day into four themes:

- 1. IPCC Carbon in the Atmosphere: From tracking emissions to eliminating them.
- 2. Decarbonizing Cities Climate Policy for Climate Justice: Transforming our cities and communities.
- 3. Social Justice Who Will Bear the Brunt? Reconciling racial and generational rifts.
- 4. System Change Creating Systems Change: Where do we start and what should we do?

The overarching purpose of the conference was to enable conversations across disciplines, highlighting the multi-faceted ways that today's climate crisis is connected to colonialism, neoliberalism, and globalization. Ultimately seeking to reflect on what is needed for systemic change. Three emergent themes developed through the conference:

- 1.A call to action.
- 2. Connection to the land.
- 3. Collaborating for change.

The thematic discussions and the emergence of additional linking ideas were enabled by explicit attention to Indigenous perspectives of land throughout the conference. Prior to the Symposium, the conference planning team organized a Land Acknowledgement Workshop in conjunction with the Office of Indigenous Initiatives. Facilitated by John Croutch, student organizers along with various faculty, staff, and students at the School of the Environment attended this workshop. Their activities and discussions informed the approach taken in the Symposium to center Indigenous perspectives of land.

This interdisciplinary event allowed for a deeper understanding of the roots of climate change, and the various perspectives and pathways that could lead towards justice-oriented climate action and systems change. Participants engaged in critical reflection on the type of action that is needed at all levels – municipal, regional, national, and international – with continued emphasis on multiple knowledges and land relations.

BACKGROUND OF THE BEATRICE AND ARTHUR MINDEN SYMPOSIUM ON THE ENVIRONMENT: CUTTING CARBON IN CANADA

The concept for the 2021 conference "Cutting Carbon in Canada" came from an interdisciplinary course project designed by students in the introductory course for the Environmental Studies Collaborative Specialization offered by the School of the Environment. In the project, students (later to be conference organizers) came together from different disciplinary backgrounds to design a conference in which carbon emissions in Canada were discussed through various lenses and approaches ranging from science and policy to education and philosophy. This provided the framework for what would later be the 2021 Minden Symposium.

Additionally, this conference represented the first time the Beatrice and Arthur Minden Symposium on the Environment was held online. Although this was the result of the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, it provided a unique opportunity to connect with a wider audience.

The event had over 300 registrants and saw students, professors, government workers, and community members tuning in from across the country and around the world. One speaker even attended from Glasgow to share her experiences while attending COP26. This virtual modality enabled fruitful discussions of climate-related issues through multiple lenses and perspectives, engaging the work and knowledge of youth activists, scientists, artists, educators, policy makers, and more.

Fostering this kind of space for transdisciplinary collaboration and bridging perspectives across fields is an important piece of the puzzle when discussing ways to take climate action that is oriented towards systemic change. Ultimately, the symposium aimed to provide a space for people to connect and learn about the climate crisis, while also bridging the gaps between different disciplines connected by a common question: what do we need to understand and to do to cut carbon emissions in Canada?

PRE-CONFERENCE EVENT

Workshop - Reflecting on Indigenous Land Acknowledgments

John Croutch, Indigenous Training Coordinator, University of Toronto

2021 SYMPOSIUM SCHEDULE **DAY ONE**

IPCC Carbon in the Atmosphere: From Tracking Emissions to Eliminating Them

Opening Remarks

Dr. Steve Easterbrook, University of Toronto

Talk - Measuring Carbon in the Atmosphere

Dr. Debra Wunch, University of Toronto

Panel Discussion – Reviewing the Latest IPCC Report

Dr. Kate Ervine, Saint Mary's University Dr. Greg Flato, Environment and Climate Change Canada - Climate Modelling and Analysis Dr. Brian Leung, McGill University Moderated by Dr. Karen Smith,University of Toronto Scarborough

Talk - Monitoring Carbon in the Atmosphere

Dr. Felix Vogel, Environment and Climate Change Canada

2021 SYMPOSIUM SCHEDULE **DAY TWO**

Decarbonizing Cities

Climate Policy for Climate Justice: Transforming our cities and communities

Talk - Carbon Pricing: Does it Work?

Dr. Jessica Green, University of Toronto

Workshop – Decolonizing Climate Policy in Canada: Overview of the ICA Report

Dr. Jen Gobby, Indigenous Climate Action

Talk – Reflections on Policy from COP26

Bryanna Brown, Indigenous Climate Action

Talk – Urban Climate Action Project: A City-University Collaborative for Social Learning

Dr. John Robinson, University of Toronto Dr. Kim Slater, University of Toronto

Talk – Creating the Municipal Carbon Budget: Edmonton as a Case Study

Maurya Braun, City of Edmonton

Panel Discussion – Transform T.O.

Bryan Purcell, The Atmospheric Fund Stewart Dutfield, City of Toronto - Environment and Energy Dianne Saxe, Environmental Lawyer; Deputy Leader, Ontario Green Party Moderated by Dr. Matthew Hoffmann, University of Toronto)

2021 SYMPOSIUM SCHEDULE **DAY THREE**

Social Justice

Who Will Bear the Brunt? Reconciling racial and generational rifts

Talk – Situating discussions on climate change through relational place stories: a look at environmental early childhood education

Dr. Jessica Green, University of Toronto

Workshop – The Youth Have Spoken

Alienor Rougeot, Fridays for Future Toronto Sophia Sidarous, Land Defender Shaelyn Wabegijig, Kawartha World Issues Centre Moderated by Kiki Wood, Stand.Earth

Workshop – Movers & Shakers Crash Course on Climate Issues

Rachel Howlett, Jordan Kilgour, Acacia Markov, Shake Up the Establishment

2021 SYMPOSIUM SCHEDULE **DAY FOUR**

System Change

Creating System Change: Where do we start and what should we do?

Talk – Play Presentation and Q&A Session

Marcus Youssef, Climate Change Theatre Actio Seth Klein, Climate Emergency Unit, David Suzuki Institute

Panel Discussion – Divestment 101: Details of U of T's New Divestment Commitment

Dr. Matthew Hoffman & Dr. Paul Downes, Divestment and Beyond U of T Rivka Goetz, LEAP U of T

Workshop – Mapping Pathways towards Sustainability and Climate Action

Dr. Hilary Inwood, David Montemurro, Alysse Kennedy, Emiko Newman -Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) Sustainability & Climate Action Network, University of Toronto

Closing Remarks

Dr. Steve Easterbrook, University of Toronto

PRE-CONFERENCE: LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT WORKSHOP

Prior to the official opening of the conference, a Land Acknowledgement Workshop was held in partnership with the Office of Indigenous Initiatives at the University of Toronto.

The workshop was organized to ensure that the conference would engage intentionally with Indigenous perspectives of land and place. Attended by the student organizers of the conference along with faculty, staff, and students at the School of the Environment, the workshop deeply informed the organizing team's approach of acknowledging the land meaningfully on each day of the Symposium.

Organizers decided to offer not just an acknowledgment each day, but also to develop a new reflection on the land each morning that invited attendees to consider different questions that bridged the acknowledgment with the conference's theme of the day. For instance, at the start of day two, which focused on policy, the following question was posed to attendees:

We invite you to question: what does really acknowledging the land where we live and work mean for climate justice? Considering policy through our discussions today, let's think together, how do policies contribute to social and environmental injustices, and how do they have the potential to change the narrative and create positive change instead?

These reflections were intended to aid in connecting the themes of each day to the overarching reflection John Croutch had shared in this initial session: "it's aways been about the land."

DAY ONE - CARBON IN THE ATMOSPHERE: FROM TRACKING EMISSIONS TO ELIMINATING THEM

The intention of day one was to open the conference and set the stage for the rest of the week.

The focal point of the day was addressing the recent release of the 6th Assessment report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and more broadly the scientific aspects of carbon within the atmosphere.

This day included opening remarks by the Director of the School of the Environment, a panel discussion on the IPCC report, and two keynote talks which addressed how we measure carbon in the atmosphere and how we model it to get future projections of different emission scenarios.

These presentations led to discussions of the ways that science is relayed to the public, and how information can be made more accessible for everyone. The day concluded with a virtual networking session so that participants were able to meet one-on-one to connect with each other.

"Canada's climate is changing... atmospheric measurements can be an important source of additional information" – **Dr. Felix Vogel (Environment and Climate Change Canada)**

DAY TWO - CLIMATE POLICY FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE: TRANSFORMING OUR CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

The focus of day two was to discuss climate policies and reflect on carbon mitigation locally. One talk explored carbon pricing mechanisms in terms of politics, how they impact emissions, and if/how you can measure the benefits.

This discussion was fruitful in enabling participants to think critically and ask questions about the ways these mechanisms are utilized in cities and communities. A case study was presented on the Edmonton Municipal Carbon budget; a discussion of the local initiative, the Urban Climate Action Project; and a panel discussion on the City of Toronto's Transform T.O. Net Zero Strategy.

Moreover, a seminar on decolonizing climate policy by Indigenous Climate Action (ICA), and a live dialogue with a youth activist from the ICA on her experience at COP26, demonstrated the need to consider the colonial impacts of climate policies and the pitfalls of various mitigation strategies for Indigenous communities.

The sessions highlighted the need for Indigenous perspectives to lead the way towards just climate solutions, and for city policies to push the limits of the status quo towards transformative shifts.

"Meaningfully co-create climate policy, rooted in Indigenous self-determination. This will require deep and broad relinquishment of power from settler colonial structures and systems to address both the climate and inequality crises in Canada."

- Indigenous Climate Action

"Bottom line: [carbon] markets are overrated, at best...we could get a lot more emissions reductions bang for our buck with less political backlash from other policies that provide immediate public benefits."

- Dr. Jessica Green, University of Toronto

DAY THREE - WHO WILL BEAR THE BRUNT? RECONCILING RACIAL AND GENERATIONAL RIFTS

The focus of day three was social justice, emphasizing the unevenness of climate change causes and impacts, and attributing these to historic and ongoing colonial policies and neoliberal practices that rely on the exploitation of marginalized communities while only benefitting the wealthiest.

One talk discussed how to engage children in these discussions, drawing on relational place stories as a way to expand environmental education towards non-anthropocentric understandings of the world that also interrupt and challenge anti-Blackness and settler colonialism.

Two workshops were offered to encourage similar shifts in thinking about the environment. One was centered on decolonization and decarbonization, discussing environmental racism and climate justice through social movements, and encouraging participant reflection through collaborative discussions.

The second workshop was a "Climate Crash Course" which provided interactive lessons on themes such as pipelines, nature-based solutions, natural capital, and the activism associated with them. A panel discussion labelled "The Youth Have Spoken" featured youth from across the country who shared their experiences in various spaces of climate activism while calling on participants to engage with and support this critical work.

"Ancestral accountability informs our responsibility...recognizing ancestral responsibility offers a theoretical framework for situating oneself within space and time in order to advance an anti-racist and non-discriminatory future" - Jacquie -Shaw & Mo Phùng, Future Ancestors Services

"The climate crisis will require a multitude of concurrent solutions...nature-based approaches are just one piece of the puzzle but have significant potential for climate change mitigation...Indigenous leadership and participation must be prioritized to ensure...nature-based solutions [do] not further perpetuate injustice" - Shake Up the Establishment

DAY FOUR - CREATING SYSTEMS CHANGE: WHERE DO WE START AND WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

The focus of day four was systems change, from personal actions to organizational change. It engaged the realm of art, education, and activism, featuring a reading from a play and a Q&A session by participants in Climate Change Theater Action.

A panel discussed the details and requirements of the University of Toronto's recent divestment announcement. A workshop, by faculty and students of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, on mapped pathways towards sustainability and institutional change.

Through these offerings, the day invited participants to reflect on their motivations and goals for sustainable action and consider where they may have influence and who they can collaborate with.

The day and week then concluded with remarks by the Director of the School of the Environment, who thanked speakers and participants and highlighted key lessons and themes from the Symposium. Three of the key themes are outlined in the section below.

"Fossil fuel divestment is about environment, ethics, but especially about power...power that fossil fuels have over our economy, society, culture... power that large institutions have in defining our individual and collective futures" - Matthew Hoffman, Paul Downes, Rivka Goetz (Divestment 101 Presentation).

"Envision where you want to go...follow existing paths if possible...establish new paths when needed...be flexible and prepare for 'rough weather.'

- Sustainability & Climate Action Network (SCAN OISE)

KEY EMERGENT THEMES

A Call to Action

As the symposium took place during the tail-end of the 26th Conference of the Parties (COP26) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Glasgow, common themes arose reflecting on the "what next," the "who" and the "how" of climate change mitigation.

Talks discussed the impact and trajectory of carbon in our atmosphere, and its consequences on the environment and people. Moreover, a key part of this theme that weaved through many talks of the week was the need to critically consider climate solutions, and to always question who given solutions are intended to benefit. For instance, attendees learned that to 'decolonize' climate policy and action relies not only on reducing emissions, but on enacting solutions that do so equitably, upholding Indigenous rights to land and dignity for all.

After over 30 years of inadequate policies and broken promises on the climate, the week's presentations showed that deep systemic change is required. These discussions led to a plea, to the audience or wider powers – the community, the university, the government, the private sector – for a shift to be made, before it is too late. This was reiterated in the final remarks of the symposium:

"Until we reach zero, we are making it worse, every ton of carbon matters... we need to stop thinking we can carry on "business as usual" while simply cutting carbon... it's time to recognize that business as usual is the cause of the climate crisis." – **Dr. Steve Easterbrook**

KEY EMERGENT THEMES

Connection to the Land

An overarching focus of the conference was the cruciality of acknowledging, recognizing, and reckoning with the realities of living and working on stolen Indigenous land as a first step towards understanding how we have arrived at the present climate crisis.

As mentioned above, a pre-conference Land Acknowledgment Workshop invited symposium organizers, students, staff, and faculty at the School of the Environment to engage critically with the legacy and ongoing nature of colonialism. This workshop invited organizers to reflect critically on their own positionalities and stories of coming to be in this place.

Moreover, the theme of "Land Back" was reiterated by several speakers throughout the week. "Land Back" is an assertion of Indigenous sovereignty broadly, and invites a reflection on the ways that each of us can contribute to tangible and material change that goes beyond mere symbolic or performative measures.

"Land Back," in addition to a physical call for land reclamation, was also explained as an ideological understanding that calls for the return of good relationships between peoples, and with the land itself. As speaker Jacquie Shaw explained, it is also helpful to reframe the need for climate action "in Canada," to its need in "What is Currently Canada." This is a future-oriented shift that recognizes the fleetingness of a nation-state, allowing us to reflect on the nature of our relationships with one another and with the land.

"No matter what we feel about the idea of Canada as a nation, it is a temporary thing - it didn't exist 200 years ago, and it might not exist in 200 years-time. Nation-states come and go. So do many of the things we build...but the land is forever, and we forget that far too often." – **Dr. Steve Easterbrook (closing remarks).**

KEY EMERGENT THEMES

Collaborating for Change

The conference's disciplinary divisions across each day allowed for recognition of the way that all these perspectives are needed in climate action. Scientists monitor the atmosphere, assess the long-term changes that result from emissions and project the changes that we can expect, but who is accountable for resolving the issues? Who designs the relevant policies? Who benefits and who is harmed? Who ensures efforts towards change are well-designed and sustainable in the long-term?

As the many presentations and workshops demonstrated throughout the conference, tackling the immensity of the climate crisis requires broad efforts that bring together individuals and groups from many sectors, working at every level locally, nationally, and globally. Governments and the private sector need to provide greater transparency when reporting emissions, and create real, actionable plans to work towards a just and sustainable future.

Institutions like universities need to provide outlets for people to get involved, and need to be aware of where their money goes and what it supports. Climate consciousness needs to be encouraged at every level, particularly through education, intentional curriculum design, and support for youth-led initiatives. Further, collaborating across multiple disciplines, and embracing and bridging multiple knowledges are essential acts of relationship-building towards true systemic change.

Just as the conference began as a collaboration across disciplines, the presentations themselves showed just how important it is to develop and foster opportunities for exchange in other contexts, always encouraging collaboration and connection over competition and isolation.

"As universities, how are we preparing our students for a climate changed world and putting the knowledge of our research into action?" – **Dr. Steve Easterbrook**

IMPACT STORIES

Participants and presenters at the conference shared their experiences at the Symposium, pointing to the importance of relationship-building and knowledge mobilization, and reflecting on what they learned from attending and participating in the events.

"I appreciated how broad the event was, covering everything from the science of the carbon cycle, to the politics of cutting emissions, to the role of universities and cities, to Indigenous climate action, and to the strength of the youth climate movement." – **Dr. Debra Wunch, Professor at the University of Toronto, Key-note speaker and Participant**

"The sessions gave me great insight into practical actions that I could take to combat inequity at my own workplace in the federal government sector. I found that the concept of training in a 'brave space' from the decarbonization and decolonization workshop, was influential in my understanding of creating equitable and sustainable work environments."

- Margarita A., Community Member, Participant

"Putting our session together helped our OISE team members remember all that we have accomplished over the 12 years we had been working together... this session led to being invited to lead another one at a different faculty after. We have used some of the materials we developed for other sessions since that time." - **Dr. Hilary Inwood, Lecturer at the University of Toronto, Presenter**

"Our work with [the Urban Climate Action Project] has continued and deepened...the [Beatrice & Arthur] Minden Symposia [on the Environment] provide for a convening of researchers and the broader communities, and that really reflects the work we do... It takes time to nurture relationships, so though you have these discrete symposia, it's great when they allow for this scaffolding to take place... to follow the current...to help with bridging...and bring actionable knowledge out in the world, doing research in non-extractive ways."

- Dr. Kim Slater, Postdoctoral Fellow at University of Toronto, Presenter

TAKEAWAYS AND FUTURECONSIDERATIONS

Hubs for trans-disciplinary learning and collaborations, such as the School of the Environment, play an important role in bringing people together towards the common goals of systems change and climate action. Opportunities to bring community members, scholars, and professionals from multiple disciplines together towards a common goal, such as through the Beatrice & Arthur Minden Symposia on the Environment, are necessary interventions that serve an educational purpose in sharing progress, reflecting on practice, and finding new ways to move forward.

Collectively, the 2021 Beatrice & Arthur Minden Symposium on the Environment presentations demonstrated the need to challenge the status quo, and to centre place-oriented, collaborative, and intersectional perspectives—all as ways to better understand and address the root causes of climate change. Some reflections that emerged from the conference, which may be of benefit in planning future events, included:

- How can the interconnectedness of each of the different themes be better communicated to spark transformative change? How can participation in a wide range of events be encouraged, rather than only in those of a particular thematic focus?
- How can community-based research and organizing play a central role in informing the development of similar events at all stages of planning? How might this horizontal knowledge sharing, rather than hierarchical views of knowledge, better serve the goal of justice-oriented climate action?
- How can deepening our relationships to place better enable us to centre multiple peoples, knowledges, and experiences, as well as remind us of our interconnectedness with all beings? How can events, online or in-person, foster this deep learning?
- How can institutions such as the university foster an attitude of collaboration over competition? How might this shift better enable interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary collaborations, and deepen understandings of multiple knowledges and perspectives?
- How can we work to disrupt coloniality and ongoing oppressive practices through critical engagement with our identities, knowledges, and places?

TAKEAWAYS AND FUTURECONSIDERATIONS (CON'T)

With rising emissions, ongoing oppression and injustice, and climate plans that do not go far enough to tackle either of these issues, taking steps towards transformative climate action can feel daunting. However, the most recent IPCC reports, despite their warnings, have also shared some optimism—we have the capacities we need to effectively mitigate climate change, as long as we do not delay.

Change needs to come from all levels – municipalities, institutions, engaging youth, coming together to bring system-based change with nuanced inter-connections. It is our hope that through deeper engagement with land, increased opportunities for collaborations, and a wider engagement with multiple knowledge systems to foster impactful action, durable change may be on the horizon.

KEEP UP WITH THE ONGOING WORK OF MINDEN SYMPOSIUM 2021 PRESENTERS:

- Urban Climate Action Project: https://urbanclimateactionproject.ca/
- Sustainability and Climate Action Network (SCAN) at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education: https://www.oise.utoronto.ca/scan
- Indigenous Climate Action: https://www.indigenousclimateaction.com/
- Shake Up the Establishment: https://www.shakeuptheestab.org/
- Childhood Place Pedagogy Lab: https://www.instagram.com/childplacepedagogylab/
- The Total Carbon Column Observing Network (TCCON): https://tcconwiki.caltech.edu/
- Climate Change Theatre Action: https://www.climatechangetheatreaction.com/
- Future Ancestors Services: https://www.futureancestors.ca/

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Thank you to our fellow classmates Jaimie Cryder, Carly Wigdor, and Ina Simon for their deep thinking and creativity at the initial stage of this project. Bringing this project to life by working together across disciplines and experiences reflects the immense value of the Environmental Studies collaborative specialization. We also thank Emma Bernardo, Jessica Pinheiro Da Silveira, and Peter Aitken for their support in making this event happen after various meetings and planning sessions over the course of Summer and Fall 2021.

We also want to share a heartfelt thank you/miigwetch to John Croutch of the University of Toronto Office of Indigenous Initiatives for his gracious support in facilitating a Land Acknowledgment workshop ahead of the conference for the event planners and School of the Environment faculty, staff, and students. This expertise aided us in reflecting on our own positionalities and responsibilities in ensuring meaningful engagement with Indigenous Land during the event and in considering future events.

In this vein, we are also grateful to be working and learning on the traditional territory of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and most recently the Mississaugas of the Credit, and we acknowledge the responsibilities we each have as treaty partners in working towards climate justice on this territory in relational and reciprocal ways, both with one another and with other-than-human life.

We hold immense gratitude as well for the land defenders, youth, researchers, scientists, educators, activists, artists, policy workers, and students who all shared their unique knowledge and experience at the conference, allowing for transdisciplinary learning, knowledge mobilization, and relationship-building. Each offering was a gift.

Finally, we thank the Minden family for their generous financial contributions that allowed this event to take place.

- Lois Boody and Victoria Flood

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The School of the Environment thanks the Minden family and recognizes the Beatrice and Arthur Minden Foundation for ongoing support, including through the funding that has enabled the convening of six Beatrice and Arthur Minden Symposia on the Environment.

The aim of these gatherings is to bring together scholars and practitioners to explore environment-related themes of global significance, and to enable lively debate, public discussion, and scholarly exchange.

Over the years, the talks, workshops, panels, and other events included in the Symposia have considered themes of science, policy, social justice, citizen engagement, and system change, with particular attention to the pressing issues of climate change and urban sustainability.

The Symposia have a long-lasting impact through supporting research projects, sparking new conversations and collaborations within and beyond the University, and bringing together a diverse range of participants.

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