BRIEFING PAPER SEPTEMBER 2021

OXFORD FUTURE OF COOLING: COOLING FOR COP26 WEBINAR SERIES

September 20, 2021: Social Interactions and Cooling Cultures

Technocentric perspectives to cooling have dominated the policy space however to enact change in our energy and cooling systems, material interventions must consider cultural implications to be successful.

Cooling is necessary for the quality of life of billions of people, whether in hot climates or temperate regions experiencing more frequent heatwaves due to climate change. By 2050, the energy needed for air conditioning is projected to triple. This huge demand has the potential to drive up greenhouse gas emissions and exacerbate the very problem it is designed to alleviate. Countries can prepare for extreme heat by prioritising passive and energy efficient technology that use low global warming potential (GWP) refrigerants, shifting the trajectory of cooling growth towards sustainability.

As we move towards one of the most important rounds of the UNFCCC Climate Negotiations, the Oxford Future of Cooling Programme is hosting a series of online seminars leading up to COP26, linking to the programme's framework on sustainable cooling. The second webinar "Social interactions and Cooling Cultures" invites **Janet Stephenson,** Research Professor and the Director of the Centre for Sustainability at the University of Otago; and **Russell Hitchings**, Associate Professor of Human Geography at University College London, navigating through the nuances of cooling cultures.

What is the role of social interactions and cooling cultures in sustainable cooling transitions?

With rising temperatures, **space cooling is expected to become an indispensable service** for health and wellbeing for most of the world's population by 2050. Understandably, this

invokes a techno-economic perspective, but there's a bigger picture behind cooling needs. **Society has an undeniable influence on our experience of cooling**, whether through cultural practices, policy, or other factors.

Cooling needs are shaped by agents of change, networks of people who have retained unique abilities, and often the power, to shape the built environment and lifestyles. Studies show how the need for cooling is rooted in ideas of 'modernity' which are **reproduced through institutions, influencing groups and social relations**. Other studies show how **cooling is linked to sweating** and how this **signifies specific messages of class belonging, gender and stereotypes.**

It is evident that the drivers for cooling demands are multiple, and culture can play a role in understanding and achieving the transition to sustainable cooling.

Highlights:

- **There is a mutual relationship between cultures and sustainability**. Cultures can inform old and new sustainable ways to consume cooling, while new sustainable practices can be integrated in social practices.
- **Culture shapes ways of thinking, values, norms, and expectations about how life should be lived and informs what people do and how they do it**. It can help inform more relevant solutions to align with the sustainable transitions we need for a climate safe future]
- **Stakeholders in the creative and arts-based industry can help shift current imaginaries of cold and cooling exclusively as mechanical refrigeration**. There are other elements and materials which can help achieve thermal comfort, but these are largely neglected and overlooked as desirable solutions.
- **An energy culture framework can help us appreciate the interlocking of technologies, behaviours, and expectations around cooling** while helping policymakers to make informed decisions on the most effective way to help shape sustainable practices.
- **Qualitative methods and geography in research can help unpack the cultural drivers for the demand of cooling**. A **2008 study unpacked** how Singaporeans prefer air-conditioned environments because of the fashion opportunities and clothing aesthetics provided by a cooler environment. It's mostly through qualitative methods that 'hidden' drivers of cooling can be unpacked, such as the **social shaming of sweat or how people have slowly grown 'addicted' to air conditioning**.

For questions on the policy recommendations above, please contact Antonella Mazzone, Research Associate, Future of Cooling Programme at Oxford University (**antonella.mazzone@ouce.ox.ac.uk**) or Sindra Sharma, Policy Advisor at E3G (**sindra.sharma@e3g.org**).

Watch a recording of the event **here**.

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About E3G

E3G is an independent climate change think tank accelerating the transition to a climate-safe world. E3G builds cross-sectoral coalitions to achieve carefully defined outcomes, chosen for their capacity to leverage change. E3G works closely with like-minded partners in government, politics, business, civil society, science, the media, public interest foundations and elsewhere.

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