



Members in Profile

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Genevieve Simpson

I am a PhD candidate at the University of Western Australia. My area of interest is the nexus between policy development and experiences at the community level. I am analysing the interaction between domestic renewable energy policy and households, local governments and industry.



I never enjoyed geography at school. It seemed to relate to redrawing maps and memorising banal statistics about a country's GDP and key exports. At the same time I was passionate about nature and the environment, keenly aware of the problems associated with a global population of more than 6 billion (now 7 billion!), and worried about the impacts of climate change. It wasn't until university that I developed a real understanding of what 'geography' means. In undertaking 'Geographical Perspectives' a door was opened – here was a single discipline that encompassed all of my interests. Demographic modelling and the difference between consumption patterns in the first world and the third, environmental policy and planning to cope with a changing population and resource base, and developing an understanding of communities and the way they interact with one another and the world around them.

While my undergraduate degree was useful in providing me with the foundations for understanding human geography, I couldn't help but ask myself 'what can I do to try to make the world a better place?'. The problem is so vast, and I am just one person. Governments, on the other hand, have power over markets, regulation and law. If the world is to be a better place governments have to be involved. And yet governments take their cues from, and are accountable to, the public. I decided this was what interested me: the interactions between government and communities.

My Honours research examined community Landcare groups in Western Australia and their reliance on federally-sourced funds and resources (reference below). Through this research I developed a great deal of respect for the work of voluntary environmental groups. I learnt that decisions made in Canberra have real impacts on the community and that communities are continually trying to adapt to changes in policy.

Next I experienced ‘the other side’ – the development of policy from a political and public administration perspective. I worked in energy policy for the Government of Western Australia, learning to appreciate the complexities of policy development. And yet it seemed to me that beyond budget balance sheets and political polls there was little regard for how policies were implemented or received by the general public.

My PhD research aims to examine the interaction between renewable energy policy and the community: examining ways the community contributes to policy development, ways policies influence community actions and whether community members agree with policy mechanisms.

Initially my research will assess industry and community perceptions of Australia’s Renewable Energy Target, with recommendations on how processes can provide better outcomes for industry and the community. The second part of my research will examine motivations for householders installing solar generation systems, and the extent to which rebates play an important part in the decision-making process. Additionally, I will examine whether community members perceive support for domestic renewable energy systems as equitable or helpful to the environment. My final research component will consider local government interactions with renewable energy policy, including a regional case study.

I hope that my research will paint a picture of what is happening with renewable energy in Australia, and that my findings can be used to inform future policy decisions, maximising environmental, social and economic benefits.

Geography - who knows where it will take me in the future?

SIMPSON, G, CLIFTON, J. 2010. 'Funding and Facilitation: implications of changing government policy for the future of voluntary Landcare groups in Western Australia'. *AUSTRALIAN GEOGRAPHER*. 41 (3). pp. 403-423

Follow my research at genevievesimpson.com or via Twitter @gensimpson_wa