Communication
Climate Outreach

Engaging the public on climate risks and adaptation

One thing that is clear from the new survey data is that adaptation policies are often as popular as policies to reduce carbon emissions – and levels of support hold up across the political spectrum.

Personal experience does seem to be key to the elevated risk perceptions around heat events. Whilst only one in five people said that they had directly experienced flooding in their own home (or knew someone who had), a substantial majority of 70% reported that they, or someone close to them, had experienced discomfort during a heatwave.

Despite finding little evidence of actual 'mitigation deterrence', people were worried that others were susceptible to this risk. A majority of survey respondents felt that 'other people' (including politicians) would be less motivated to address the causes of climate change if the UK was well prepared for its impacts.

Engaging the public on climate risks and adaptation
A briefing for UK communicators

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Communication

Public Interest Research Centre

The problem with war metaphors

In a war, people and resources are all subsumed into the war effort. Normal priorities and concerns are swept aside, and the government (and military) assume more top-down control.

In a war, the moral appeal becomes about 'obeying orders' and 'doing your duty'. If you go above and beyond your duty, you can be a hero, if you don't do your duty you are a traitor.

Image: Chuanchai Pundej/Unsplash

When we talk about building, forging, restructuring, incubating change, we are appealing to the potential of positive, long term transformation in the wake of this crisis. But, again, appealing to any positive outcomes must be done with the utmost sensitivity.

https://publicinterest.org.uk/part-4-metaphors

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Narrative tactics

The co-option of language in the battle of ideas. Everyone wants to Build Back Better now: with radically different agendas. Messaging is regularly being borrowed/stolen, losing its meaning, squeezing the narrative space & confusing the debate.
... Is this tactic a problem or should we see it as a win? Should we relinquish co-opted rhetoric or hold ground? Does it suggest we need to hone our messaging or shift tone?

Optimism over reality. A PMA can get you anywhere, right?! A compelling story of a rosy future is a powerful tool: obscuring the current mess. Opponents are positioned as 'doomsdayers', far less appealing to persuadables, and alienating/confusing for anyone who doesn't agree.
... So how to do critical opposition whilst telling a story of a better future? How do we highlight stories of injustice and oppression, whilst explaining things can be different?

Pointing the finger. Where we level responsibility shapes the solutions we seek. Should we be dobbing in our neighbours & blaming asylum seekers for their own plight (sp. alert: no) or calling for a change of policy? Blaming individuals obscures responsibility of politicians.
... How do we move away from individual responsibility framing? What can we do to call this out and bring systemic (and often historic) responsibility into the frame?

https://publicinterest.org.uk/narrative-tactics-around-the-new-normal
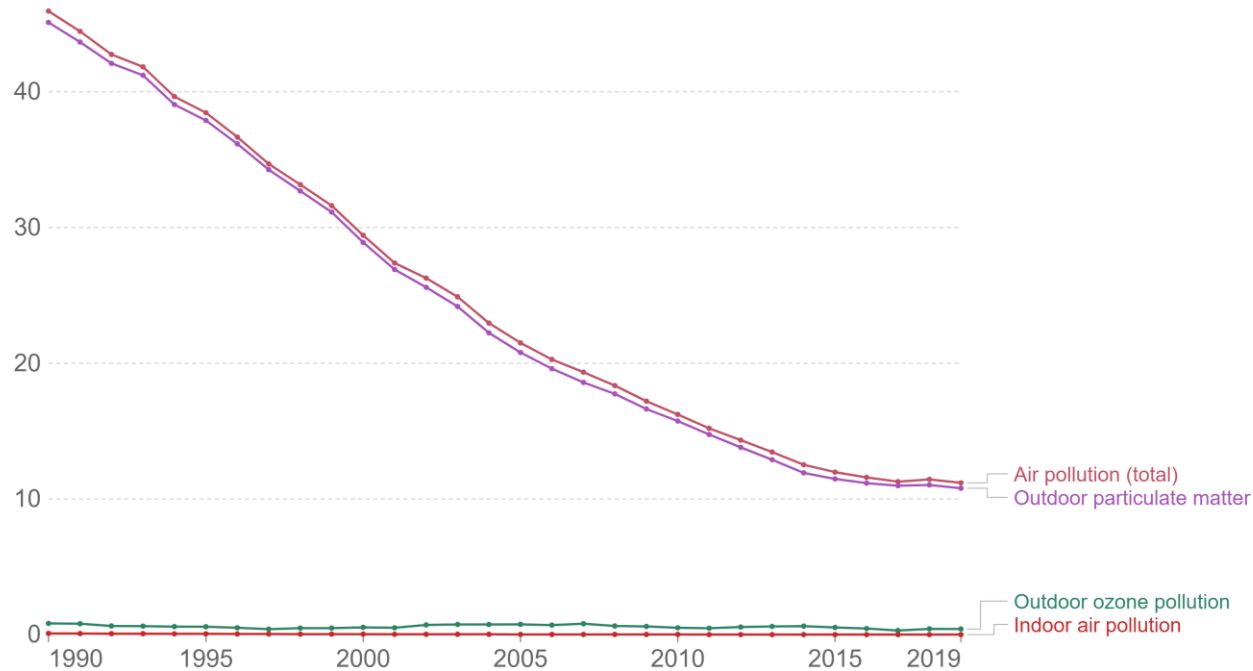
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Communication
Air pollution example

Death rate from air pollution, United Kingdom, 1990 to 2019

Death rates are given as the number of attributed deaths from pollution per 100,000 population. These rates are age-standardized, meaning they assume a constant age structure of the population: this allows for comparison between countries and over time.

Our World in Data

40

30

20

10

0

Air pollution (total)
Outdoor particulate matter

Outdoor ozone pollution
Indoor air pollution

1990   1995   2000   2005   2010   2015   2019

Source: IHME, Global Burden of Disease (2019)   OurWorldInData.org/air-pollution • CC BY

Positive message
We can improve air quality in the future, reducing deaths and ill health in the process

Rebuttal
Air quality is not an issue that resonates with me, and I'm told that it's the best it's ever been

Research links
Climate Outreach – personal experience
PIRC – optimism over reality

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Communication

Questions for discussion

What is it that we want to communicate?
What is the purpose of the communication? What do we want to achieve?

What are the counter-narratives?
What stories are we trying to replace? Where are they coming from?

What are the benefits of consistency?
Is it useful to have the same messages as others? Is a more specific, bespoke message more appropriate?

Potential outputs
- Commissioning new research to develop specific communications advice/resources
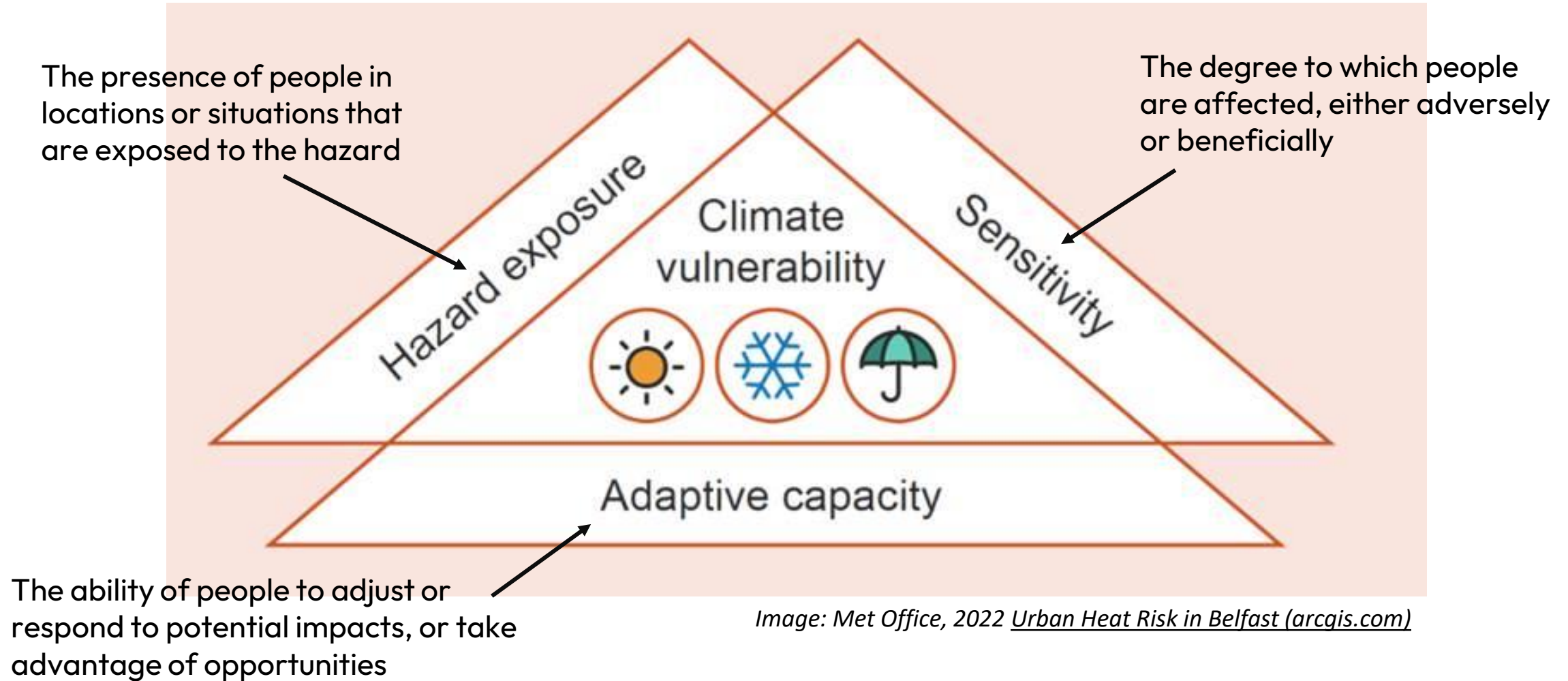- Organising workshops to learn and practice messaging (subgroup?)

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Vulnerabilities

The presence of people in locations or situations that are exposed to the hazard

The degree to which people are affected, either adversely or beneficially

The ability of people to adjust or respond to potential impacts, or take advantage of opportunities

Image: Met Office, 2022 Urban Heat Risk in Belfast (arcgis.com)

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Vulnerabilities

Example - Heat risk in Belfast

https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/d7e3520fbf0e4b23ae06eb665288d2ca

Hazard exposure
Number of hot days (+25°C) and warm nights (+15°C) in summer
The proportion of the housing stock that are apartments or terraced housing
Population density (the number of people per square kilometre)

Sensitivity
Proportion of the population aged 65+
The proportion of Belfast's vulnerable assets within an electoral ward
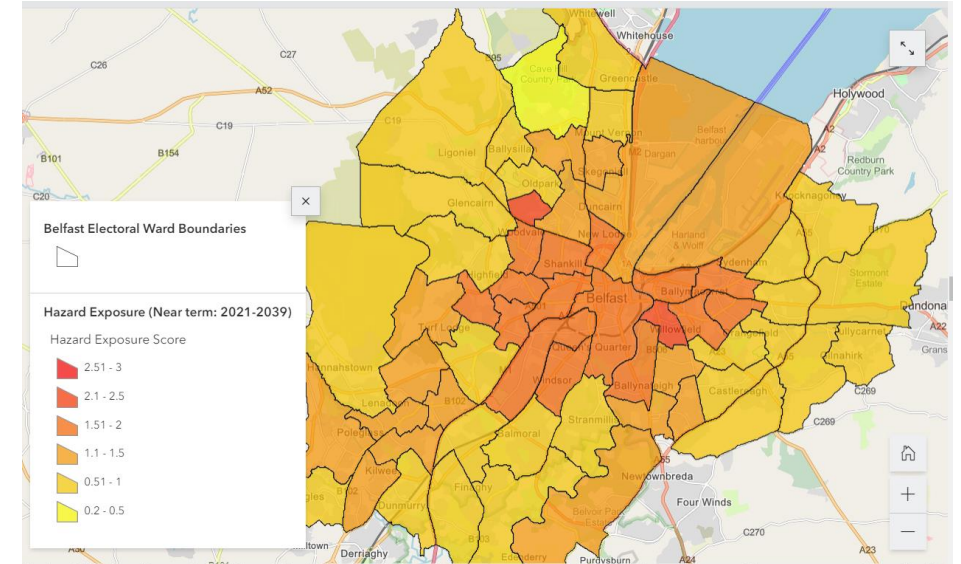Proportion of the population with a long-term health condition

Adaptive capacity
Level of deprivation
Proportion of publicly accessible green space

Heat Vulnerability = Hazard Exposure + Sensitivity - Adaptive Capacity

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Vulnerabilities

Questions for discussion

What are the key questions about vulnerabilities?
What do we need to know? What do we need to be able to communicate?

Do we need to look at different vulnerabilities individually?
Examples raised in previous meetings include energy, food, and migration
Is the Vulnerability Index a useful model to communicate priority issues and areas?
Can it, or similar models, be applied generally, or do we need specificity?

Potential outputs
- Forming subgroups to focus on specific vulnerabilities, reporting back to the main group
- Developing or adopting existing tools to quantify and communicate vulnerabilities

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