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## Climate Memory, Youth Activism, and Cultural Resilience: A Comparative Socio-Cultural Study of Coastal Communities in Australia and Norway

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### ABSTRACT

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This article examines how coastal youth communities reinterpret climate change through collective memory, cultural identity, and digitally mediated activism. Comparing coastal communities in Australia and Norway, the study analyzes how environmental disruption reshapes youth participation, place attachment, and social resilience within distinct institutional and cultural contexts. The article argues that climate activism is not only a political response to ecological risk but also a cultural process through which young people reconstruct belonging, intergenerational responsibility, and community futures.

Using comparative cultural analysis, digital ethnography, policy analysis, and secondary environmental datasets, the study compares two analytical dimensions: climate memory and youth environmental mobilization. The findings indicate that Australian coastal youth activism is strongly shaped by bushfire memory, reef degradation, Indigenous ecological knowledge, and climate justice discourse, whereas Norwegian coastal youth activism is mediated through Arctic change, maritime identity, state environmental governance, and tensions around petroleum dependence. Across both cases, digital communication platforms transform local ecological experience into transnational climate narratives.

The study contributes to social transformation scholarship by conceptualizing climate memory as a mediator between environmental crisis and cultural resilience. It concludes that sustainable climate policy must integrate youth participation, local ecological knowledge, cultural heritage, and intergenerational justice.

**Keywords:** climate memory; youth activism; coastal communities; cultural resilience; Australia; Norway; environmental sociology; digital activism; social transformation; climate justice

## INTRODUCTION

Climate change is among the most significant drivers of contemporary social and cultural transformation. Its effects are not limited to ecological systems but extend into community identity, political participation, intergenerational relations, cultural memory, and everyday practices of belonging. Coastal communities are especially important sites for examining these transformations because they experience climate change through sea-level rise, storms, coastal erosion, biodiversity loss, changing livelihoods, and shifting relationships with land and sea.

This article argues that youth climate activism in coastal communities should be understood not only as political mobilization but also as cultural work. Young people interpret environmental change through inherited memories, local narratives, digital communication, scientific knowledge, and future-oriented anxieties. Climate activism therefore connects social structures and cultural practices with institutional systems, communication platforms, and broader societal transformation.

Australia and Norway provide analytically rich comparative cases. Both are affluent democracies with strong environmental research capacities and high levels of youth digital participation. Yet they differ significantly in ecological vulnerability, energy politics, Indigenous knowledge systems, national climate narratives, and institutional responses. Australia's coastal youth activism is shaped by bushfires, reef degradation, drought, fossil fuel conflicts, and Indigenous environmental justice. Norway's coastal youth activism is shaped by Arctic warming, maritime heritage, petroleum dependency, and strong welfare-state institutions. This comparison enables analysis of how climate memory and cultural resilience develop differently across environmental and institutional contexts.

Existing scholarship on climate politics has emphasized global governance, carbon emissions, ecological vulnerability, and environmental movements. Beck's theory of risk society explains how modern societies increasingly organize around manufactured risks. Castells' work on networked movements shows how digital communication enables decentralized activism. Recent studies of climate justice emphasize the unequal distribution of climate harms across class, race, generation, and geography. However, much climate scholarship remains insufficiently attentive to cultural memory, place-based identity, and youth meaning-making within coastal communities.

Studies of youth climate activism often focus on protest cycles, media visibility, and political demands. While valuable, such studies sometimes treat youth activism as a universal generational phenomenon, overlooking the ways local ecological histories shape activist narratives. Similarly, resilience scholarship frequently emphasizes institutional adaptation and infrastructure planning while underanalyzing

symbolic belonging, cultural heritage, and intergenerational memory. This article addresses these limitations by integrating environmental sociology, cultural studies, youth studies, and communication research.

The research gap is threefold. First, there is a theoretical gap in explaining how climate memory mediates between environmental disruption and collective action. Second, there is an empirical gap in comparative analysis of youth climate activism across culturally distinct coastal societies. Third, there is an institutional and communicative gap in understanding how digital platforms translate local environmental experiences into global climate discourse.

The novelty of this study lies in its conceptualization of climate memory as a socio-cultural mechanism of transformation. Climate memory refers to the collective interpretation of environmental change through remembered disasters, ecological loss, inherited place narratives, and anticipated futures. It links past experience with future responsibility. This article argues that climate memory shapes whether youth activism becomes merely issue-based advocacy or a deeper form of cultural resilience.

The analytical framework guiding this study is: environmental disruption → climate memory → digital communication → youth activism → cultural resilience → societal transformation. The objective of this study is to compare how coastal youth communities in Australia and Norway use climate memory and digital communication to construct activism, cultural resilience, and social transformation.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study employs a comparative socio-cultural research design combining digital ethnography, environmental discourse analysis, policy analysis, and secondary data interpretation. Australia and Norway were selected because both are high-income democratic societies with advanced climate research infrastructures, active youth environmental movements, and significant coastal identities, while differing in climate vulnerability, energy regimes, Indigenous knowledge systems, and institutional environmental governance. The unit of analysis is the coastal youth climate community, understood as a networked formation connecting local ecological experience, youth identity, digital communication, and institutional engagement. The study compares two analytical dimensions: climate memory and youth environmental mobilization. Empirical materials include public digital climate activism archives, youth movement statements, environmental policy documents, coastal adaptation reports, UNESCO and UNDP sustainability reports, national climate assessments, and peer-reviewed scholarship on climate justice, youth activism, and cultural resilience.

The analysis used thematic coding to identify patterns of ecological loss, intergenerational responsibility, place attachment, institutional trust, climate justice framing, and digital narrative circulation. Critical discourse analysis examined how youth activists represent environmental risk, community futures, cultural heritage, and state responsibility. Triangulation was achieved by comparing activist communications with environmental indicators, policy documents, and academic literature. Ethical considerations included reliance on publicly accessible materials, avoidance of identifiable personal data, and sensitivity to Indigenous knowledge by treating it as culturally situated

rather than extractive evidence. The study is limited by uneven availability of localized youth climate data, the rapidly changing nature of digital activism, and the absence of direct interviews; nevertheless, its comparative framework enables a rigorous interpretation of how climate memory mediates socio-cultural transformation.

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## **Findings and Discussion**

### **1. Climate Memory and the Cultural Interpretation of Environmental Risk**

The findings indicate that climate risk becomes politically meaningful when it is culturally remembered. In Australia, coastal youth activism frequently draws on memories of bushfires, coral bleaching, drought, and extreme heat. These events are not interpreted as isolated disasters but as signs of a disrupted national future. The Great Barrier Reef functions as both ecological system and cultural symbol; its degradation becomes a narrative of collective loss, national responsibility, and intergenerational injustice.

In Norway, climate memory is shaped by Arctic warming, changing coastal livelihoods, shifting marine ecosystems, and tensions between environmental identity and petroleum wealth. Youth activists often frame climate change through contradictions between Norway's green international image and its continued oil and gas production. Coastal memory is linked to maritime heritage, fishing communities, and northern landscapes experiencing rapid environmental change.

The comparison shows that climate memory is not simply recollection of environmental events. It is a cultural process through which communities interpret ecological disruption in relation to identity, responsibility, and future survival. Australian climate memory is often crisis-centered and justice-oriented, while Norwegian climate memory is more contradiction-centered, focusing on the tension between environmental stewardship and fossil fuel prosperity.

This finding contributes to environmental sociology by showing that climate action depends not only on scientific knowledge but on cultural interpretation. Communities mobilize when environmental change becomes embedded in shared narratives of loss, responsibility, and possible transformation.

### **2. Youth Activism, Digital Communication, and Transnational Climate Narratives**

Digital platforms play a central role in transforming local climate experiences into transnational activist narratives. Australian youth activists use Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and movement websites to connect reef loss, bushfire trauma, Indigenous land justice, and fossil fuel criticism. Digital communication allows local ecological experiences to become part of global climate justice discourse.

Norwegian youth activists similarly use digital platforms to connect Arctic warming, oil politics, and intergenerational responsibility with global climate movements. However, Norwegian digital activism often reflects stronger institutional engagement, including petitions, party youth organizations, school climate strikes, and policy-oriented campaigns. Australian activism appears more confrontational toward state climate policy, particularly

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around coal, gas, and disaster response.

The comparative evidence demonstrates that digital activism does not erase local difference. Instead, it translates local climate memory into globally recognizable frames. Australian youth frequently use moral urgency and ecological grief, while Norwegian youth often emphasize policy contradiction and long-term responsibility. Both cases show that digital platforms function as cultural translation systems.

Theoretically, this supports networked movement scholarship while extending it through cultural analysis. Digital climate activism is not only connective action; it is narrative circulation. It enables young people to convert local environmental vulnerability into transnational claims about justice, identity, and planetary futures.

### **3. Institutional Trust, Climate Governance, and Youth Political Agency**

Institutional context significantly shapes how youth activism develops. In Australia, youth climate activism often reflects frustration with perceived government inaction, fossil fuel influence, and insufficient recognition of Indigenous ecological knowledge. This produces a more oppositional activist culture. Young people frequently frame institutions as failing future generations.

In Norway, institutional trust is comparatively stronger, but youth activists still challenge the contradiction between climate leadership and petroleum dependency. Norwegian activism often operates through institutional channels while simultaneously critiquing state hypocrisy. This produces a dual strategy of engagement and contestation.

The comparison demonstrates that institutional trust does not eliminate activism; it changes its form. Where trust is lower, activism becomes more confrontational and justice-oriented. Where trust is higher, activism may become more policy-focused but still critical. This finding complicates simplistic assumptions that activism emerges only from institutional exclusion. Youth activism can arise from both distrust and disappointed trust.

Policy implications are significant. Climate governance must recognize youth not merely as future stakeholders but as present political actors. Meaningful participation requires institutional mechanisms that incorporate youth voices, local ecological knowledge, and intergenerational justice into coastal adaptation planning.

### **4. Cultural Resilience and the Transformation of Coastal Belonging**

Climate change reshapes coastal belonging by altering how young people imagine community futures. In Australia, coastal identity is increasingly tied to ecological grief, Indigenous sovereignty, reef protection, and climate justice. Youth activism transforms belonging from attachment to place into responsibility for ecological repair.

In Norway, coastal belonging is shaped by maritime continuity, Arctic vulnerability, and ethical debate over fossil fuel dependence. Youth activists reinterpret national prosperity through questions of environmental responsibility. Cultural resilience emerges from the capacity to preserve coastal identity while transforming energy and development pathways.

Across both cases, cultural resilience does not mean preserving community life unchanged. Rather, it involves the ability to reinterpret heritage, identity, and social responsibility under conditions of ecological instability. Youth activism contributes to resilience by linking memory, critique, and future imagination.

This finding contributes to resilience scholarship by emphasizing cultural adaptation rather than merely infrastructural preparedness. Coastal communities require sea walls, adaptation plans, and emissions reductions, but they also require narratives that sustain belonging and collective responsibility.

**Table 1. Comparative Matrix of Social Structures, Cultural Transformation, and Societal Outcomes**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Case 1: Australia</b>	<b>Case 2: Norway</b>	<b>Empirical Evidence</b>	<b>Analytical Interpretation</b>
<b>Climate Memory</b>	Bushfires, reef loss, drought, heat	Arctic warming, maritime change, oil contradiction	Climate reports and activist discourse	Environmental risk becomes meaningful through cultural memory
<b>Institutional Context</b>	Lower trust in climate policy and fossil fuel governance	Higher trust but strong critique of petroleum dependency	Policy documents and youth movement statements	Trust shapes activist strategy
<b>Cultural Identity</b>	Reef protection, Indigenous justice, coastal vulnerability	Maritime heritage, Arctic responsibility, welfare-state environmental ism	Public climate narratives	Place identity shapes climate action
<b>Digital Communication</b>	Moral urgency and climate justice framing	Policy contradiction and intergenerational responsibility	Public digital activism archives	Platforms translate local memory into global discourse
<b>Youth</b>	Confrontation	Institutional	Movement	Different

<b>Agency</b>	nal justice-oriented activism	engagement with critical pressure	reports and public campaigns	governance cultures produce different mobilization forms
<b>Resilience Outcome</b>	Ecological grief transformed into justice politics	Heritage transformed into ethical transition politics	Comparative analysis	Cultural resilience depends on reinterpretation of belonging
<b>Policy Implication</b>	Integrate Indigenous knowledge and stronger mitigation	Resolve contradiction between oil wealth and climate leadership	Sustainability reports	Climate governance must include cultural legitimacy

The table shows that climate activism is shaped by the interaction between ecological experience, cultural memory, institutional trust, and digital communication. Australia’s youth activism is strongly marked by visible climate damage and justice claims, while Norway’s activism is structured by ethical contradiction and institutional engagement. In both cases, youth activism transforms coastal belonging into a politics of responsibility.

### Theoretical Propositions

**Proposition 1: Climate memory mediates the relationship between environmental disruption and youth collective action.**

Young people mobilize when ecological change becomes embedded in shared narratives of loss, responsibility, and future threat.

**Proposition 2: Digital platforms transform local climate experiences into transnational cultural narratives.**

Digital communication enables coastal youth to connect local ecological vulnerability with global climate justice discourse.

**Proposition 3: Institutional trust shapes the form, but not necessarily the intensity, of youth climate activism.**

Low trust produces confrontational activism, while higher trust produces policy-oriented but still critical engagement.

**Proposition 4: Cultural resilience depends on the capacity of communities to reinterpret place identity under ecological change.**

Resilience is not only material adaptation but also symbolic transformation of belonging, heritage, and responsibility.

## **CONCLUSION**

This article compared how coastal youth communities in Australia and Norway use climate memory and digital communication to construct activism, cultural resilience, and social transformation. The findings demonstrate that climate activism is not only a political response to environmental risk but also a cultural process through which young people reinterpret place, responsibility, and collective futures.

The analysis shows that Australian youth activism is shaped by bushfire memory, reef degradation, Indigenous justice, and frustration with fossil fuel politics. Norwegian youth activism is shaped by Arctic change, maritime heritage, institutional trust, and tensions surrounding petroleum dependence. These differences illustrate how climate action is culturally situated even when it participates in global movements.

The article contributes theoretically by conceptualizing climate memory as a mechanism linking environmental disruption with social transformation. Climate memory enables communities to transform ecological loss into collective action and cultural resilience. Empirically, the study demonstrates that digital communication platforms play a central role in translating local environmental experience into global climate narratives.

Institutionally, the findings suggest that climate governance must incorporate youth participation, local ecological knowledge, cultural heritage, and intergenerational justice. Policymakers should not treat youth activism as symbolic protest but as evidence of emerging democratic demands for climate legitimacy. Coastal adaptation policies must address not only infrastructure and emissions but also cultural belonging and community meaning.

The study is limited by reliance on public digital materials and secondary data. Future research should include longitudinal ethnography, interviews with coastal youth activists, and comparative analysis across Indigenous, island, and Global South coastal communities. Further research should also examine how artificial intelligence and climate communication technologies shape future environmental participation.

Ultimately, this article argues that coastal youth activism reveals a major transformation in contemporary society: climate change is becoming a cultural condition, not merely an environmental problem. Young people are turning climate memory into public action, digital communication into transnational solidarity, and ecological grief into demands for social transformation

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