

Preface

On a grey December morning in 2007, one of the authors of this book—Gordon Wilson—parked his folding bicycle at the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium to join a ‘Task Force on Sustainable Development’ that was supported by the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU). The meeting comprised university lecturers from five European universities. It discussed possibilities for partnership on a climate change curriculum.

Through several months of deliberation, none of the Task Force members saw any point in replicating university curriculum on climate change that already existed across Europe at that time. While not extensive in its reach, this curriculum tended to be led by the natural science, and did so perfectly adequately. Thus, through a joint desire to do something new, the idea of the lived experience of climate change—the everyday experience of individuals and groups of climate-related events such as drought, floods and sea level rise—was born. The aim was not to deny or attack the science but to add a very different, complementary knowledge in order to develop a more holistic approach to understanding the climate challenge.

Gordon Wilson suggested the concept of lived experience to the Task Force because of its use in research on the underlying dimensions of poverty in developing countries, which was his subject area. His ‘reward’ for doing so was to be charged with producing a concept note which was presented to the EADTU annual conference in September 2008. It was well received and with further EADTU support a successful bid was made to the EU Erasmus programme to produce Masters curriculum as open educational resources on the lived experience of climate change. The project also committed to piloting the curriculum to students across our universities in an exercise of virtual mobility (that is, using social media for students and lecturers to transcend individual, institutional boundaries). The project involved eight universities (five distance teaching and two conventional face-to-face) across six EU countries plus the EADTU. It started in October 2009. It is described in this book in Chap. 6 Box 6.2.

The project, as judged by external assessors and 26 students who participated in the pilot delivery, was a great success. Meanwhile, in producing the teaching

resources, we had been forced to think much more deeply about the fledgling core concept of lived experience. That was only the start, however, because then the students challenged us via social media tutorials, structured group work and their essays to go further still.

By the time the project ended in April 2012, everyone who had been associated with it felt that, in the concept of the lived experience of climate change, there was something to tell the world. We—Gordon Wilson and Dina Abbott who between us had produced most of the written teaching texts and workbooks—took up the challenge, one result of which is this book.

Of course, as we have engaged ever deeper with the book's conception and the writing of it, we have learned much more about the lived experience of climate change, its nuances, its explanatory powers, its contradictions and its possible use to inform policy. We are continually reminded, however, that we owe an enormous debt to our colleagues on the original project and the students who participated so enthusiastically in the pilot. Literally, this book could not have happened without you.

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Knowledge, Science and Public Action

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