

Ian Burton, awardee in the Climate Change category (13th edition)

It is a great honor and surprise to acknowledge my receipt with two colleagues, (Neil Adger and Karen O'Brien) of the BBVA Foundation Award 2021 for contributions in this new category of the human and social dimensions of climate change.

I would like to express my personal thanks, and more importantly appreciation from the wide and rapidly growing community of researchers on the social and human dimensions of climate change especially those who have focussed on adaptation.

It is most timely and appropriate that the Foundation and its selection committee have established and recognized the importance of these fundamental dimensions of the climate change crisis. Global warming (now increasingly referred to as global heating) was initially identified and analyzed by atmospheric scientists and meteorologists who naturally focussed on the anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gasses and the need to control them. This was labelled as "mitigation". Little attention was given to the need to adapt to climate change by anticipatory social, economic and policy changes that could help manage the risks by reducing exposure and vulnerability.

After a decade or more (1992 – 2005) of relative neglect the scientific and policy communities came to understand the importance and need for adaptation. This change was led by a group of social scientists and humanitarian scholars who came together through the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and in other assessment and research groups to increase the knowledge and understanding of adaptation to present and future climate change and were slowly able to gain recognition of the value; the need, and the potential, to reduce the risks and impacts of climate change, as a complement to mitigation. I count myself privileged to have been an early member of such groups.

Extreme events related to weather and climate have always been with us. Floods, droughts, tropical cyclones, wildfires, and other hazards have in the past been attributed to nature or Acts of God. A common response was one of acceptance, or sometimes such events were seen as divine punishment for poor or sinful human behavior. This has been labelled as Humans under Nature. In the modern scientific and industrial era our growing technological capacity and hubris

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led to the idea that we could control nature. We tended to think of Humans over Nature. More recently the partly in response to the increasing frequency and magnitude of climate-related disasters, a new awareness that humans should work in cooperation with nature has emerged. This is by no means entirely new. It has also re-emerged from indigenous cultures who are increasingly making their voice heard. We have moved into an era where harmony and cooperation with nature are being recognized as fundamental to the human future. Let us call it Humans with Nature.

The story does not end here. In the past we have adapted to nature; to climate; and to climate extremes, with the changing perceptions of being subject to nature, over nature and in harmony with nature. Now there is a new challenge for adaptation scientists.

We are already in the new era of the Anthropocene. There is no longer any such thing as pure nature unmodified by humans. We must now face of adapting to our own technology, and to the environment we have created. We have to adapt to ourselves, and the world we have created.

Are we up to the task? We must come to understand the new risks of climate change, together with a long list of other emerging threats. This will require more than local, micro, and incremental adaptation. I venture to suggest that it requires change at a transformative level. Can we see and understand and achieve such global and all-encompassing adaptation?

We often ask ourselves if we have hope or reason for optimism. The politically correct response, often repeated, is that we should be "cautiously optimistic". I would go further and offer the view that new hopes are now a necessity to help guide our future research, and indeed to safeguard the future of humankind and the planet. This is a challenge to us all and especially to the younger generations, and it is encouraging to see how so many are rising to the occasion and taking things into their own hands.

I would like to conclude by again expressing appreciation to the BBVA Foundation Frontiers of Knowledge Awards for this timely recognition of the importance of these human and social dimensions. And please do not stop here. We are at the beginning. A new beginning.