

Why did we undertake this study?

Coastal communities are undergoing unprecedented social and ecological change. While quantitative measures provide evidence of the rate and magnitude of these changes, fewer studies offer qualitative accounts from the perspective of those tasked with responding to impacts. This study sought to offer authentic, affective representations of rapidly changing and diverging coastal regions through the voices of those on the frontlines of socio-ecological change.

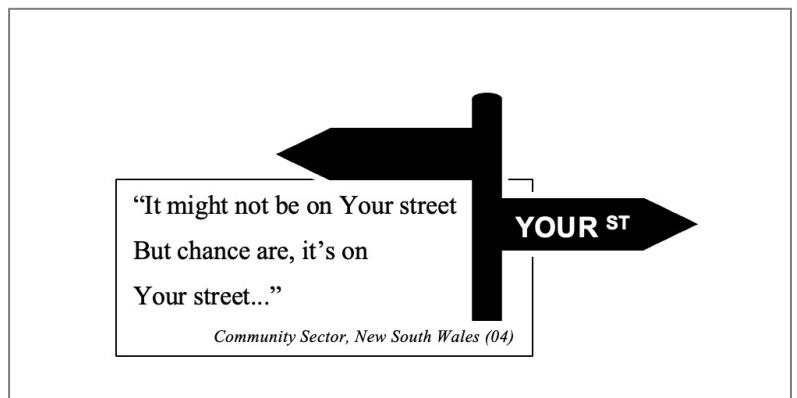
How was it done?

Participant-voiced poems were generated through over 65 semi-structured interviews with coastal decision-makers (e.g., local and state government employees) and community representatives (e.g., government and non-government service providers) in Australia's fastest growing coastal regions. The poems were used to convey the uncertainties and devastation arising across increasingly unequal coastal communities. The nationwide study included cases from each coastal Australian State and Territory.

What did we find?

In this study, we engaged poetic devices (e.g., rhythm, repetition) and used participant's own words to develop collective narratives across the case sites. As a novel technique, 'reflexive prompts' that direct questions from participants to potential audiences (not least, the research team) were included to enhance the affective and political efficacy of the poems. In combination, 'Roughened Terrain', 'Erosion' and 'Unconsolidated' evocatively portray:

- Stark contrasts between the lived experiences of 'neighbours'.
- Intensifying inequalities often 'hidden' behind mown lawns and front doors.
- The significant role of societal structures in creating and sustaining inequalities through complicated, non-adaptive and hierarchical social systems.



What are the implications?

Qualitative studies that share the impacts of socio-ecological change through the direct voices of those on the front lines of response provide a powerful and necessary contribution to a field dominated by quantitative and summary accounts. Poetic inquiry is one method, among many, that can viscerally represent the lived experiences of increasingly vulnerable contexts. This study reveals that life in the Anthropocene is distinguished by intensifying inequalities and is more accurately termed the Obscene. This demands a renewed focus towards structural changes that comprehensively support equity across all dimensions of socio-ecological systems.

Want more information?

The full paper is available from: <https://rgs-ibg.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/geoj.12559>

Citation: Thomsen D, Smith T, Elrick-Barr C (2023). The Anthropocene Obscene: Poetic inquiry and evocative evidence of inequality, *The Geographical Journal*.

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Coastal Governance: Embracing Vulnerability and Change

