

TH1.30.11 Cities and Climate Change: The Big Questions, Current Research, and Theoretical Contributions to Urban Studies (PART I)

Size and sustainability: investigating multi-level drivers of local government climate change action

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Research into municipal action on climate change tends to focus on bigger cities and those important scholarly efforts have identified the factors correlated to climate policymaking. Less well studied is the applicability of those correlations across different-sized American cities – an important gap since more than half of Americans live in municipalities with fewer than 25,000 residents. This study uses negative binomial regression models on survey data from 1,834 local governments ranging in population from 1,997 to 741,206 to evaluate the impacts of different sources of capacity: from state government to citizen involvement. The research finds that state involvement is more important in larger cities. The role of citizens is increasingly important to the climate change efforts of smaller localities, though such citizen involvement can also push against climate action in cities of all sizes. The importance of other sources of capacity, such as professional city management, does not vary with municipality size. The research adds to both the literature of local government sustainability and municipal policymaking theories, especially with regards to size, capacity and acting on commons issues.

Trans-local action and local innovations in climate change policy. A comparative analysis of German major cities

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The trans-local dimension of local climate policy has gained increasing attention in local policy research. Observers emphasize the positive effect of trans-local action on policy innovations, because such action provides several opportunities for cities, e.g. privileged access to best practice solutions or support of collective interest representation of municipalities. Simultaneously, trans-local activities are an instrument of local actors to push their preferred policies forward. Some studies examine trans-local activities – e.g. the membership in municipal networks and the implementation of network goals – as dependent variable. They explain the scope of such activities by structural and institutional factors (e.g. Sharp et al. 2011) or by motivational dispositions of local actors (e.g. Benz et al. 2015). Others concentrate on the political functions of those trans-local networks (Kern and Bulkeley 2009). What is lacking so far, at least in the European context, is comparative research on the impact of those activities on local climate policies in a narrower sense. The proposed paper aims at testing the explanatory power of trans-local activities against institutional and socio-economic variables. Applying Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA), the paper will contribute to the debate on the role of cities within transnational and multi-level governance structures. Therefore, it poses two interrelated questions: First, do trans-local activities substantially contribute to the range and scope of local climate policies or are they rather symbolic in their nature? Secondly, if there is an obvious influence of trans-local activities, is this a singular effect or rather an artefact of underlying conditions, like the availability of resources or the general socio-economic situation? The proposal is based on a research project of the German Research

Foundation comparing the climate mitigation policies of all German major cities (85 cities with more than 100.000 inhabitants).

The Steering Ability of City Governments: Reducing GHG Emissions from Energy Generation

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Reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in cities requires fundamental changes to urban infrastructures, institutions, and behaviors. The diffuse and fragmented distribution of governance authority in this arena makes reducing GHG emissions a particularly challenging task for city governments. Despite these challenges, city governments continue to voluntarily commit to dramatically reduce GHG emissions, particularly those arising from energy generation. This paper examines the role of city governments in this complex governance arena, and the conditions under which they are most likely to be effective. I start from the premise that in order to be effective, city governments must be able to steer behaviors and relationships in the city toward their desired ends. The success a city government has in meeting its GHG reduction goals is therefore determined by its steering ability, which I propose is composed of a city government's internal capacity, scope of authority, policy environment, and ability to coordinate and collaborate. I compare the experiences of New York City, Los Angeles, and Toronto to understand how different configurations of the components of steering ability facilitate or inhibit the ability of city governments to reduce GHG emissions. I focus in particular on their efforts to reduce emissions that arise from energy generation, by introducing cleaner fuels and renewable energy supplies. Drawing on interviews with decision makers in the three cities, the results show that there is not one component of steering ability that determines the effectiveness of city governments. Rather, particular configurations of steering ability in particular contexts determine the ability of city governments to effectively steer in a complex governance arena.

Mental Models and the Robustness of Institutions: Lessons for Mitigation and Adaption Strategies at the Regional Government Level

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The institutional responses to global environmental change have been a key consideration for both the urban affairs and the climate change communities. Regional level actors can overcome collective action problems through regional institutions with support in terms of funding but also with the information dissemination about successful and unsuccessful practices. The higher level support provides the foundation or opportunity to gain cooperative governance. We utilize a recent survey of metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) in the U.S. to investigate the structural impact of mental models, scale of and robustness of MPOs for successful outcomes in regional mitigation and adaption strategies for climate change. We explore what the diversity of survey responses and differing MPO capacities suggest for successful climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts. We suggest that the research will permit localities, regions, states, and nations to address organizational issues that will give them greatest opportunity for success when dealing with climate change mitigation and adaptation.