

Policy Choice in Local Responses to Climate Change

A comparison of urban strategies

Edited by
Hubert Heinelt and Wolfram Lamping



Policy Choice in Local Responses to Climate Change

Since the 1990s ‘beliefs’, ‘ideas’ or ‘knowledge’ as well as processes of communicative interactions such as persuasion, argumentation and learning have received increasing attention in social science for the understanding of political changes. This book makes a significant contribution to this scholarly debate and will be of interest to practitioners, showing on one side how climate change has received more and more attention in policy making at the local level and changed the urban agenda and on the other how different the responses of cities to this global challenge are – and how these differences between cities can be explained.

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Hubert Heinelt is professor of public administration, public policy and urban studies at the Institute of Political Science, Technische Universität Darmstadt, Germany. His current research focuses on European integration and urban studies.

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Hubert Heinelt and Wolfram Lamping

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The development of local knowledge orders: a conceptual framework to explain differences in climate policy at the local level

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Chapter 3

The epistemologies of local climate change policies in Germany

Karsten Zimmermann, Jasmin Boghrat and Meike Weber

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Chapter 4

The trans-local dimension of local climate policy. Sustaining and transforming local knowledge orders through trans-local action in three German cities

Arthur Benz, Jörg Kemmerzell, Michèle Knodt and Anne Tews

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Chapter 5

The effects of knowledge orders on climate change policy in urban land management and real estate management: a case study of three German cities

Marina Hofmann, Nikolas D. Müller, Christoph J. Stankiewicz, Andreas Pfnür and Hans Joachim Linke

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Chapter 6

Institutionalizing a policy by any other name: in the City of Vancouver's Greenest City Action Plan, does climate change policy or sustainability policy smell as sweet?

Meg Holden and Majken Toftager Larsen

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Introduction: how to explain differences in urban strategies and measures to deal with climate change

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1. Aims and origin of this special issue

1.1. The growing relevance of constructivist approaches

Since the 1990s, ‘beliefs’, ‘ideas’, or ‘knowledge’ as well as processes of communicative interaction such as persuasion, argumentation and learning have received increasing attention in the social sciences for the understanding of political change.

Even if these terms and their underlying theoretical and methodological starting points are quite diverse and sometimes even incompatible, they nonetheless commonly owe their relevance to a certain scepticism about two alternative, pre-existing approaches to the explanation of political reality, namely institutionalist and rational-choice approaches. These approaches are criticised because they would either fail to explain political change in situations which are not clearly determined by institutions or even not recognise that institutional ‘structures do not come with an instruction sheet’ (Blyth 2003, 696; as is the case with institutionalism) or neglect the relevance of processes of preference formation and transformation in explaining political change (as is the case with the rational-choice approach).¹

By way of contrast, the growing literature arising within what is variously referred to as the ‘cognitive turn’ (Edmondson and Nullmeier 1997), ‘constructivist turn’ (Checkel 1998) or ‘argumentative turn’ (Fischer and Forester 1993; Fischer and Gottweis 2012) highlights the importance of concepts such as knowledge, ideas and social learning for understanding processes of preference formation and transformation as well as for policy or institutional changes.

Constructivist approaches assume that interests are not exogenously defined or given, but endogenously defined within processes of collectively interpreting reality, constructing shared meanings (or sense-making) and defining problems. ‘For those starting to think in factors and variables these categories have to be translated in knowledge of the involved actors’ (Nullmeier 2014, 27; translated by the authors). To understand the way actors come to know what they want is therefore essential for the analysis of political processes. In this context, ideas defined as knowledge about reality play a central role since they serve as a filter for interpreting and making sense of the world and for guiding action. By means of socially constructed knowledge, the surrounding world takes on meaning for actors and therefore offers them