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Vortrag: How can 'ordinary' cities become climate pioneers?

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One way to tackle climate change locally is to adopt already successful approaches pioneered by other cities. However, high-profile climate pioneers tend to be larger cities that can access significant resources to develop and implement ambitious strategies, and their approaches may not be suitable or easy to apply in very different contexts. Thus, we challenge the common research practice of focusing on the 'usual suspects' (large leading forerunner cities) and argue that more researchers should study 'ordinary' cities instead. While such unusual suspects often lack a reputation as climate policy pioneers, their creative practices have the potential to be replicated by a myriad of other ordinary cities.

Drawing on climate and environmental governance literature and two cases from Germany, this chapter explores how ordinary cities may become pioneers. Mid-sized cities like Remscheid and Göttingen demonstrate that local governments can catch up with the leaders, even if they have only limited resources and capacities, for example through frequent participation in third-party funded climate-related projects. Nevertheless, many more hidden pioneers and their creative approaches need to be discovered, because they can serve as models to help with the transformation from ordinary to pioneering cities.