

Konferenz der britischen Political Studies Association
29.03 - 31.03.2021, Belfast/online

Vortrag: Cities, climate change, and co-operative federalism in Germany

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Germany is often viewed as a classic example of co-operative federalism, as well as a climate and environmental leader. However, closer inspection reveals approaches to climate policy integration that diverge significantly at the subnational level. In recent years, eight of the sixteen Länder have passed Climate Change Acts that commit them to legally-binding carbon reduction emissions, but the remaining states have not (yet) done so. Furthermore, even amongst these eight states there are significant differences in how Länder governments work with municipalities to develop and implement climate policies. For example, North Rhine-Westphalia and Baden-Württemberg provide significant support to local governments through funding schemes and advice, but these are notably lacking in Bavaria, where the energy transition is much more reliant on private actors.

Our paper will show how these different approaches reflect contrasting political and socio-economic contexts; some areas of Germany are still heavily reliant on fossil fuel extraction and combustion, while others export renewable energy. In addition, however, the various multi-level systems that operate within the different Länder also shape how municipalities address the issue. In response, some municipal governments have sought out greater support horizontally through international city networks or more informal arrangements. However, others may lack the resources to engage with such networks and could struggle to develop and implement ambitious climate policies, thereby increasing the gap between laggards and leaders. Such an eventuality could indicate that German federalism is becoming less co-operative, at least in the climate sector – and could mean that the country fails to achieve its climate protection objectives.