

26th World Congress of Political Science – International Political Science Association
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Vortrag: Transferring local climate policies and practices within and across levels in Germany

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Communities across the globe are facing increasing threats from extreme weather events. Capacity constraints mean that local governments might be keen to adopt policies and practices from elsewhere to address these issues, rather than invest scarce resources in developing their own approaches. In particular, smaller and mid-sized cities could be more likely to copy specific initiatives, because they may be less inclined (and less able) to act as climate leaders than major urban centres. Furthermore, those that have not (yet) experienced severe weather events might want to learn from how others responded to storms, heatwaves and flooding, or are preparing for similar threats in future. Yet few studies have examined the diffusion patterns of local climate mitigation and adaptation policies.

This paper will focus on forms of transfer and diffusion in local climate mitigation and adaptation policies in Germany. Many German cities set up climate mitigation strategies in the 1990s and supplemented them with climate adaptation strategies during the last 10 years. Drawing on in-depth case studies of three German cities (Potsdam, Würzburg and Remscheid), plus interviews in ten additional municipalities, it will discuss the characteristics of leaders, adopters and laggards in local climate mitigation and adaptation, as well as the external drivers of policy transfer and diffusion. While the transfer of good practice in the 1990s was triggered primarily by transnational municipal networks, the revision of climate mitigation strategies and the emergence of climate adaptation strategies have been driven mainly by subsidy programmes. These funding schemes, which some German states and the federal government launched during the last decade, have led to some cities adopting innovative and ambitious policies but carry the risk that other municipalities may be left behind.

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Vortrag: Climate Change and the Evolving Nature of Federalism in Germany

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In the past, some have characterised Germany as a classic example of ‘cooperative federalism’, due to the involvement of Länder governments in the second legislative chamber, policy initiatives such as the need to ensure ‘equal living standards’ across the country, the range of shared taxes across tiers of government and the willingness of the states to engage in ‘voluntary co-ordination’. Germany’s level of policy co-ordination between public bodies may have contributed to its image as a climate and environmental leader – a country that has managed to achieve many of its greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets and embrace the energy transition. However, regional disparities between and within the different Länder have led to German federalism becoming increasingly asymmetric, because some states and municipal governments are more capable of developing their own policy agendas than others, including in the environmental sector. Other developments, such as deindustrialisation and financial constraints in a number of cities, have exacerbated this trend – particularly as the economy in some parts of the country is still reliant on fossil fuel extraction and combustion.

This paper will draw on qualitative fieldwork in four German states (Bavaria, Baden Württemburg, Brandenburg and North Rhine-Westphalia) to highlight how different states and municipal governments have adopted diverging strategies on climate change. It will show how a diminishing level of coercion and support from the centre has led to a weakening of vertical collaboration and reduced horizontal competition between actors. In response, some municipal governments have sought out greater support horizontally through collaborative networks in order to drive up environmental performance. However, these networks tend to be dominated by cities that have sufficient resources to develop and implement ambitious climate policies, and these municipalities are also more likely to be successful in external funding bids. As such, this trend could lead to some subnational jurisdictions lagging even further behind existing leaders, thereby accelerating the trend away from cooperative federalism within Germany.