Policy Paper: The Governance of Climate Strategies in Metropolitan Cities

By Janina Walkenhorst, Tomás Vellani, Franziska Oehlert, Prof. Dr. Fabian Schuppert and Prof. Dr. Sabine Kuhlmann

May 2023

1. Project Description

The pilot study conducted by two research teams from the University of Potsdam[1] explores climate governance from a city-comparative perspective, considering both participatory and administrative governance. This study aims to show which innovative governance processes – especially involving citizens – lead to more effective climate policy in metropolises. Therefore, we are looking at two different stages within the political system. The input stage deals with citizen participation and other involved non-state actors in the decision-making process. The throughput as well as the output stages are especially important when looking at administrative structures and processes around policy creation and implementation.

More precisely, the comparative study examines the elaboration and implementation of climate strategies in the three metropolitan cities of Paris, Buenos Aires and Berlin. But why were metropolitan cities chosen as the object of study, and why the three mentioned above? First, there is a broad consensus in research that cities are responsible for over 70 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions. Against the background of the 2015 Paris agreement, local policymakers and global organizations have become increasingly interested in developing climate strategies. Many cities have joined networks such as the C40 to share experiences and knowledge in developing Paris-compatible strategies.

Despite recognizing that cities are essential players in climate change mitigation and adaptation and the increasing willingness of cities to find solutions, urban governance remains an underdeveloped topic in the climate policy literature. While some comparative research on climate policy-making in metropolitan cities and on metropolitan governance in general exists, there is a research gap when it comes to systematically analyzing administrative and participatory governance from an international cross-city comparative perspective.

The comparative study is based on 29 expert interviews conducted in 2022 with civil servants in the three studied cities. Twelve of these were conducted in the Berlin administration, nine in the Buenos Aires city administration, and eight in Paris, whereby the surrounding metropolis of Grand Paris was included due to the close cooperation between the city of Paris with the inter-municipal association.

2. Cases

The selection of city cases is guided by a most different cases approach, according to which a considerable degree of variation between the cases regarding key explanatory variables (such as institutional structures, functional configurations, and participatory practices) is expected to provide valuable insights into relevant causal relations regarding the climate policy effectiveness (as our key dependent variable). Therefore, the three metropolitan cities of Berlin, Paris and Buenos Aires were selected for in-depth case studies representing different administrative and local government traditions as well as different participation formats (citizen assemblies, co-production, loose workshop formats).

At the same, the comparability of these cases is ensured since all selected cities are exposed to similar external pressures (e.g., heat waves) and have formulated similar goals (e.g., carbon neutrality by 2050 or even 2045, as in the case of Berlin). Furthermore, the three cities are part of the C40 network, which sets common standards for climate strategies in metropolitan cities, thus aligning their climate policies.

From a comparative perspective, it is particularly interesting to learn how cities differ in their urban climate governance. Considering these differences in climate strategy development and implementation, we are interested in factors that may explain the divergence. Furthermore, the cities have chosen different participation formats. However, it is not sufficiently clear what the reasons were for these choices and how the type of citizen participation may have influenced climate policy-making.

3.   Challenges from a Governance Perspective

Relations within-administration
The existence of dedicated units for tackling climate change adaptation and mitigation overall has a positive effect on within-government coordination for the development and implementation of climate strategies. However, not all organizations are created equal. Typical organizational forms for tackling climate change at the local level have been agencies or line departments. In both cases, there is a trade-off between closeness to political decision-making and technical expertise in a field where know-how is crucial. The special-purpose character of climate mitigation and adaptation administrative units can present challenges to accessing high spheres of political decision-making within the local government and, thus, complex coordination. Particularly when attempting to promote a climate mitigation and adaptation dimension in other units with their own administrative agendas. Coordination mechanisms that gather political decision-makers, as well as a clear political direction, can mitigate coordination challenges.

Vertical intergovernmental relations
Insufficient involvement of the submunicipal level (*Bezirke*) in the BEK elaboration and implementation process has been highlighted as a challenge in Berlin, leading to lower awareness and acceptance of the climate strategy among the submunicipal level. Consequences of this at the submunicipal level are 1. reduced engagement in the reformulation process of the BEK, as well as 2. knowledge gaps in BEK implementation and 3. low commitment to the implementation of the policy. Instead, local considerations are prioritized over Berlin-wide policy. In order to achieve a comprehensive, area-wide implementation throughout Berlin, the link between the submunicipal level and the BEK must be strengthened.

A more intensive, earlier involvement of the submunicipal level in the BEK elaboration process would be advisable. Existing BEK reformulation workshops can be more actively communicated, and the consultative character expanded to better reflect climate manager considerations, particularly in view of implementation challenges of modules where the *Bezirke* are expected to lead or carry out significant tasks. Furthermore, new interfaces can improve the visibility of the BEK at the submunicipal level. For instance, bringing climate managers on-site for training.

Both Paris and Buenos Aires exhibit a different approach of centralized city-level functional responsibilities for the elaboration and implementation of climate policy. Buenos Aires does not present a significant involvement of its submunicipal level (*comunas*). Paris has begun to involve the submunicipal level (*arrondisements*) more intensely in the re-elaboration of its climate strategy in 2022. However, functional responsibilities for climate policy remain at the central level while the

arrondisements have been involved in activities related to the mobilization of citizens such as workshops and neighbourhood walks. Most *arrondisements* do not have dedicated climate managers but *ad hoc* contact persons with bundled responsibilities. Thus, limiting the extent of cooperation possible.

The manner in which vertical intergovernmental relations play out in each city is strongly tied to its institutional specificities. While Berlin must rely on multi-level cooperation, Buenos Aires and Paris present an asymmetrical distribution of functional responsibilities for climate policy and can thus operate more centrally.

Horizontal intergovernmental relations

Climate change, as a wicked problem, goes beyond administrative boundaries. Local climate action plans must consider surrounding subnational units. An extension of the BEK over Berlin borders, or the creation of a metropolitan strategy for climate change, as in the metropolitan area of Paris, would be meaningful steps in this direction. Fundamentally, cooperation in the Berlin-Brandenburg area is lacking beyond some specific policy fields. The large number of actors involved both at political and administrative levels (two *Länder* and a series of municipalities) makes coordination a complex affair. Coordination capacities, such as the Joint regional planning B-BB (Gemeinsame Landesplanung B-BB), must be strengthened. Political alignment between both *Länder* presents an opportunity for strengthening coordination units in general and in the field of climate change mitigation and adaptation in particular.

4.   Challenges from a Citizen Participation Perspective

Three main approaches towards citizen representation

The aim of (deliberative) citizen participation formats is that "everyone concerned" participates in decision-making. However, the term "everyone concerned" is interpreted in different ways, which is why we investigated in our project who was recruited for the participation formats and according to which criteria. Overall, three approaches can be identified.

1.   **Everyone who wants to can participate**

This means that all citizens are invited to participate, often in the form of online participation or citizen dialogues, often held at the district or local level. "Everyone" includes not necessarily only the citizens as individuals but also various stakeholder groups, such as associations and companies.

2.   **Representative composition**

The premise of this approach implies that all citizens of a city are affected by climate change. Random selection is used to represent the city on a small scale. Quotas such as gender, age, etc. are often used at the same time to get an accurate representation of the inhabitants of an area.

3.   **Overrepresentation of particularly vulnerable social groups**

The criterion for this approach is that groups are involved that are particularly affected or vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, such as e. g. increasing heat, which leads to health problems among seniors, or the younger generation who will have to deal with the consequences of the climate crisis for a longer period of time.

The first approach is prone to reaching mainly interested parties that have specific prior knowledge and have more resources to participate in. This can lead to a selection bias. The advantage though is that everybody can join the discussion and many people can be reached. The goal of a representative composition is mainly that every social group is represented consistently with their emergence in the population. Accordingly, the goal is to represent the population as accurately as possible. The challenge of the second approach is that the goal of statistical representation is difficult

to achieve, because, in large assemblies, it is difficult to ensure that the correct categories are adequately represented. Purely looking at gender or age does not solve the problem, since specific structural problems are often reasons for non-participation. One way to avoid systematic outages is e. g. to offer childcare or language assistance. The third approach to overrepresentation has the difficulty that the population is not equally represented. At the same time, the question arises as to which criteria are used to identify particularly vulnerable social groups. However, the focus of this approach is to a) work specifically with those who are particularly affected and b) where appropriate, give a voice to those who are otherwise not (as often) heard.

The three approaches show that no matter which representation approach one chooses, there is no perfect way. Nevertheless, it remains important that different perspectives are included. In addition, the question is how to weigh the different and possibly competing citizen recommendations. To prevent problems in the weighting of recommendations, such as a selection bias or political/administrative influence, an independent player without specific interests - i.e., neither grassroots ideology nor state interest - should organize and moderate the process.

The Goal of Participation: Tensions between Legitimacy – Effectiveness - Social Acceptance

Good Climate Policy should lead to effective emissions reductions and adequate adaptation measures: If citizen participation is supposed to deliver that, the question is, how should that be achieved? While some measures seem to be quite technical, others require specific legal conditions. That raises the following question: What exactly can citizen participation deliver? In our interviews, we could identify three main normative goals, which policy-makers commonly associate with citizen participation: increasing democratic legitimacy, effective climate measures and social acceptance. However, these normative expectations of citizen participation seem somewhat excessive, and it is doubtful that citizen participation formats can manage to comprehensively fulfil the normative claims of legitimacy, effectiveness, and acceptance.

The original idea of citizen participation is that more citizen involvement increases democratic legitimacy, especially at the input level. The term social acceptance initially refers to approval (or the absence of criticism). In a broader understanding, social acceptance can also relate to identity in the sense of emotional identification with the corresponding measures. It can be created via participation and social learning. Good or better results in the context of climate policy mean, first of all, developing effective climate protection measures that reduce CO2 emissions, in addition to adaptation measures to deal with emerging challenges such as new heat conditions. This means that citizen recommendations must also be at the end of a functional quality. Here the question arises: What role should citizens play if there are ultimately technical solutions? In this case, citizens can discuss decisions for certain solutions (preferences) as well as red lines through everyday knowledge or perspectives.

In all observed cases, "social acceptance" of climate action measures is stated as the primary goal. The participation formats aim to achieve an overall social vision for societal transformation that citizens can identify with. At the same time, it is also about the acceptance of climate measures in general through the legitimacy of the participation process itself. Furthermore, it was important for the administrations to gain more insight into the preferences of citizens.

The above examples show that, especially in relation to climate policy, participation formats are confronted with different expectations and cannot always fully meet all of them. A pure instrumental understanding of citizen participation formats aiming at social acceptance could lead to the

assumption that citizen participation is primarily a means of democratic whitewashing, whereas a pure targeting of effective measures does not inevitably require the involvement of citizens. Therefore, we argue for a **more sensitive approach to the conflicting goals of citizen participation**.

Lacking sufficient linkage to political input channel
The problem of insufficient institutional linkage of the recommendations from the respective participation formats can be identified in the cases analyzed. Reasons for the limits of citizen participation are not only seen in the representative system, but also in ensuring the effectiveness as well as the feasibility of the measures. To avoid (political) dissatisfaction, it is therefore important to operate with **appropriate transparent expectation management** on the part of politics and administration. The extent of citizen consultation as well as who decides on the inclusion of recommendations afterwards should be both clearly communicated.

5.   Conclusion
This policy paper provided first insights into the current challenges regarding urban climate policy. In doing so, the two dimensions of governance and citizen participation were examined. Concerning the first, relations within the administration, as well as vertical and horizontal intergovernmental relations were looked at and recommendations derived from the interviews conducted in the city administrations of Berlin, Paris and Buenos Aires. Moreover, the main approaches and goals of citizen participation were identified. We clarify where tension conflicts arise in the objective of citizen participation and where the previous limits of citizen participation lie. As a result, we argue for a sensitive and transparent approach towards citizen participation formats. This information is intended to offer orientation to city administrations and policymakers in the revision of their climate action plans and their ongoing implementation or, more broadly, on how to devise and implement mitigation and adaptation policies.

After looking at Berlin, Paris and Buenos Aires (as a representative of the global south), the case selection will be extended to include more cities in the global south and having another political system (autocratic) to get further and deeper insights into the influence of politico-administrative characteristics on the urban governance and participation processes.
Besides identifying good practices in climate policy-making for policymakers, the project aims to engage with key civil society stakeholders, political and administrative decision-makers, and private actors to present the project's findings to a broader audience.

About the Authors

Professor Sabine Kuhlmann (University of Potsdam) sabine.kuhlmann@uni-potsdam.de	Sabine Kuhlmann is Professor for Political Science, Administration and Organization at the University of Potsdam. Some of her research interests are comparative local administration and administrative reform.
Professor Fabian Schuppert (University of Potsdam) fabian.schuppert@uni-potsdam.de	Fabian Schuppert, is Professor for Political Theory at the University of Potsdam: He focuses on climate justice, social (in)equalities and ethics of risks in his current research.

Tomás Vellani, M.A. (University of Potsdam) tomas.vellani@uni-potsdam.de	Tomás Vellani is a research associate at the chair of political science, administration and organization working on the governance of digitalization policy and climate policy at the local level.
Janina Walkenhorst, M.A. (University of Potsdam) janina.walkenhorst@uni-potsdam.de	Janina Walkenhorst is a research associate at the chair of political theory, working on citizen participation, democratic innovations and social cohesion – especially with a focus on climate policy making.
Franziska Oehlert, M.A. (University of Potsdam) franziska.oehlert@uni-potsdam.de	Franziska Oehlert is a former research associate at the chair of political science, administration and organization. She has carried out research on local migration policy and local climate policy.