

Municipal Reactions to European Energy and Climate Governance. The Case of German Cities.



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“[t]he approach to tackle the climate crisis challenge can only be holistic, integrated, long-term and, most of all, based on the participation of citizens. This complex picture is best managed at local level. Cities must therefore become leading actors for implementing sustainable energy policies, and must be supported in their effort”

(former Commissioner for Energy, Andris Piebalgs, on the launch of the CoM 2008)

→ several efforts to coordinate cities' responses to climate change despite limited competencies for local level

EU policy instruments targeted at cities

- Regulative policy
- Financial incentives, funding programmes
- Promotion of transnational coordination and diffusion of best practices between cities

Local reactions to European Multi-Level Governance

- How do local actors react to the European multi-level system?
- What types of policies lead to effective local climate policy?
- What conditions facilitate or hinder effective local climate policy?

Empirical work

- Field studies in three German cities: Frankfurt, Munich, Stuttgart
- Analysis of key documents: climate mitigation concepts, council proceedings
- Qualitative interviews in each city with high ranked civil servants and heads of relevant departments of environment, planning, international and European affairs (2012-2013)

- Regulations and directives mostly seen as constraints
- However, supportive character of EU legislation is emphasized

“there are no EU limit values in climate policy [compared to clean air policy], that’s why things get done faster with regard to clean air policy” (Interview in Stuttgart)

“It was difficult in the beginning [implementation of the low emissions zone] but we are glad today ... Sometimes we would prefer a more forceful approach” (Interview in Frankfurt)
- Local administrators use constraints as arguments in local debate

“... as an environmental administration we can refer to European and national goals” (Interview in Stuttgart)

- Additional funding:

“EU projects have significant financial importance as they provide additional resources ... for the fulfillment of tasks which have to be done anyway”

(Interview in Munich)

“we only participate in projects where work can be done that has to be done anyway” (Interview in Stuttgart)

- Incorporation of new ideas:

“... new ideas emerge [when participating in EU projects]” (Interview in Munich)

- Learning even when city intends to provide best practices for others

- Transaction costs of project management/ controlling too high

Facilitation of cooperation and diffusion



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Covenant of Mayors

- Self-commitment as an argument in political debate

“The Covenant was helpful, because it supported general arguments in favor of climate protection policies” (Interview in Munich)



- Goals of the Covenant largely in line with cities' climate policy
 - Membership seems to have little impact on local climate policy
 - Exception: Stuttgart's need to modify climate strategy to meet the requirements of the CoM

Facilitation of cooperation and diffusion

European Green Capital Award

- Initiative of the Commission to promote environmentally friendly urban living
- Cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants can apply



- Motivation for Frankfurts application:
“to set strategic and communicative incentives for sustainable urban development” and “to initiate innovation both within the administration and in the local society” (Interviews in Frankfurt).
- linked different policy fields to present coherent approach
- Mainstreaming of sustainable planning, climate change mitigation etc. → New cross-departmental working groups

Local administration units

- Necessary to collect information and develop skills needed to react to EU policy instruments
- E.g.: Coordinator or office for European affairs

Variation

- can be established in different departments (centralized, e.g. in the office of the lord mayor, or decentralized, e.g. economic department)
- Human and financial resources
- Tasks and competencies

- Decentralised unit with limited resources and competencies
 - Each department manages EU activities separately
 - leads to higher workload in regular departments
 - this may prevent local actors from engaging in EU activities that are not exactly in line with existing local policy and from exploring new approaches
- Centralised EU units with more resources and competencies may provide assistance with regard to management of EU activities

Conclusions

- Local climate policy is deeply embedded in multi-level structure
- European multi-level system perceived as highly relevant for local action

- However, only little evidence for EU induced convergence of local climate policies and for profound impact of EU initiatives
 - Legislation, funding and self commitment often used strategically to implement or support existing measures
 - Local actors commit to EU climate change policies while local path dependencies persist

- Administrative structures shapes local actors' options for action
- Resources determine capacities to generate knowledge and skills needed to participate in the EU multi-level system

Policy recommendations

- provide flexible solutions which can be adjusted to local contexts
- account for conflicting goals at the local level by incorporating industrial policy, environment policy, social policy, urban development policy etc. (policy mainstreaming)
- include regions/ communities close to regional centers
- improve cooperation and diffusion of best practices across regions, across provinces and across national borders
- ensure effective and fair governance (prevent discrimination of cities with limited resources and/ or with underdeveloped climate policies)
- provide channels of interest representation and improve responsiveness



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Thank you

Local reations to European Multi-Level Governance

- Intermediary factors
 - national institutional frameworks
 - Institutional arrangements and distribution of competencies
 - Political culture
 - specific local context conditions
 - vulnerability to EU regulations
 - Political and administrative capacities
 - Path dependencies
 - motivational factors
 - Action perceived as necessary, beneficial or appropriate