

Introduction

Responding to Climate Change: Governance and Social Action beyond Kyoto

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It has become an accepted wisdom within academic circles and policy discourse that climate change is a global problem in need of global solutions. More than a decade after the formation of the UNFCCC, the Kyoto Protocol was ratified by a sufficient number of states to come into effect in February 2005. Strenuous international negotiations have led to the development of important structures and processes to govern reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. Many, however, consider the progress made as grindingly slow and, in the light of scientific evidence about the rate of change in the global atmosphere and recommendations for the need to reduce emissions by at least 60 percent over the next fifty years, inadequate. In the absence of more effective international action, and cognizant of the big task ahead, alternative attempts at climate change governance and social action have emerged. These approaches recognize that international agreements—if implemented—provide only a partial means through which the mitigation of climate change can be directed, and in turn are reliant on actions in a variety of arenas and at different scales to be effectively implemented. They also increasingly recognize the need to respond to and plan for the impacts of climate change, thus opening up new arenas and linkages between science and policy.

This special issue of *Global Environmental Politics* seeks to move beyond the framework of the international political processes within which the climate change issue is frequently discussed to illuminate how climate protection is sought across a myriad of different sites. In seeking to understand responses to climate change, we are interested in “the processes that create the conditions for ordered rule and collective action within the political realm”¹—that is those processes which take place within formalized arenas of government/governance

1. Stoker 2004, 22.

and also through the informal means by which other forms of collective action and social mobilization take shape. In taking this approach, this special issue seeks to address two problematic aspects of the dominant approach to the study of global environmental politics. First, in much of the mainstream global environmental politics literature, state and nonstate actors are treated as distinct entities and the focus of attention has been on the role of state-based actors and formal political processes, with the role of nonstate actors significant only insofar as they effect the positions of nation-states and the outcomes of international negotiations.² While there are some important exceptions which focus on the nature and role of global civil society, those scholars allow the pendulum to swing so far away from the state that it is notable mainly by its absence.³ Second, the analysis of (global) environmental politics has tended to deal with one geographical scale in isolation from the other levels within which decision-making takes place.⁴ Not only does this lead to a partial view of the nature of environmental governance and social mobilization, but it also reinforces a relatively naïve view of the nature of governance in the contemporary era as one in which levels of the state can be neatly discerned, borders remain intact, and sovereignty is uncontested.

In seeking to challenge these dominant assumptions, contributors to this special issue provide an account of the multitude of responses to climate change which move beyond the confines of international negotiations between state-based actors to examine the formal and informal arenas within which a variety of actors are engaged in working toward climate protection. From this collection, three themes emerge which warrant particular attention—the nature of climate change governance and social mobilization between and beyond state and nonstate actors; the multi-scalar nature of initiatives and action for climate protection; and the implications of these emerging forms of governing both for how responsibility for collective action problems should be shared and for the success of current approaches.

Beyond Binaries: Climate Protection by State and Nonstate Actors

The collection of papers demonstrates that a wide range of state and nonstate actors are becoming involved in governance for climate protection; they also suggest that this easy binary is breaking down as “state” actors take on roles of promotion, facilitation, encouragement and advocacy long associated with civil society actors, while at the same time actors from outside the state are becoming responsible for the development of policy goals and their regulation. In her case study of England’s North West region, Mander illustrates how governmental,

2. Auer 2000; and Litfin 1993.

3. Betsill and Bulkeley 2004.

4. Bulkeley 2005; see also Adger et al. 2003; and Shaw 2004.

nongovernmental and hybrid organizations are simultaneously involved in the development and implementation of renewable energy policy. Walker et al. show how a similar range of actors have been involved in the development of “community” renewable energy projects across the UK. In the US, Dilling describes the range of actors who are getting involved in carbon management and demonstrates how nonstate actors are in some instances getting ahead of state actors and in other instances working with state actors in developing mechanisms for carbon accounting and trading that effectively build carbon-centered climate protection governance. In each case, developing collective action in response to climate change is not a simple matter of lobbying government authorities to take action, but shows how processes of governing for climate protection involve actors across this binary in defining the problem, setting policy agendas and implementing action.

This is not to imply that there is an emerging consensus about the climate protection problem and what should be done about it across different cohorts and coalitions of actors. The motivations for different actors to get involved can differ considerably and as such are not all driven by a common ethical sentiment or material goal. For example, some actors may get involved (as Moser shows for the emerging climate protection movement in the US) because they are impatient with the slow pace of international climate treaty negotiations and they want to see greater emission reduction action get underway immediately. This impatience may be driven by a sense of urgency arising from the incongruence between the scale of the problem and the limited scope of internationally agreed upon emission reduction goals, or from a sense of responsibility to “do the right thing,” take leadership where others refuse to do so, or some combination of these reasons. Others may be motivated to get involved in climate protection because they recognize that whatever international targets and emission limits will be developed at the international level will still require subnational implementation. They may see little reason to ‘wait and see’ especially if important long-term decisions like infrastructure development are being made now. Closely related to this motivation is one frequently found among business pioneers as suggested by Bode et al. in the example of the CO₂ competition in Hamburg, or as Moser describes, among business leaders and the NGOs that engage them in the US: many early actions to reduce energy use and hence emissions (e.g., through energy efficiency improvements) simply make good business sense—they save cost and thus give a market advantage over others whose expenses remain unchanged.

Another set of actors may be motivated to get involved in climate protection because their efforts can serve as proof of concept “laboratories” for policies and mechanisms, serving as a model for others and thus as mobilizers to exert pressure on other actors in the same sector, the same level of government, and on higher levels government. Again, Moser describes this motivation among US American communities and states. In a slight variation on this

theme, Bode et al. demonstrate how experiments with Joint Implementation (JI) and Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) type instruments in Hamburg yielded positive results. They can spawn interest and creativity among those who would implement the mechanisms, but also provide real-life learning experiments that can help refine the instruments for implementation elsewhere. In other cases, as Aall et al. illustrate with respect to municipal climate planning in Norway, the involvement of actors is motivated by political mandate or requirement from a higher level of government which can in turn lead to policy innovation. The two papers on renewable energy development in the United Kingdom (Mander and Walker et al.) illustrate yet another motivation to get involved: climate governance may be a vehicle to realize different, but related policy objectives, such as the diversification and security of energy supplies or the regeneration of communities. This is commonly known as issue linkage in political science and as “spill” in the context of social movements whose sub-movements come together on common ground. Finally, there are those who are motivated to get into climate action in an effort to undermine or block implementation of whatever policies, guidelines, and mechanisms are being put forward from the international level—as illustrated by Mander in the case of opposition to the development of wind energy, or by Moser in the US climate contrarian countermovement to the emerging climate protection movement.

The papers reveal a spectrum of actors and networks involved in climate protection, from those which are more state-like, with government actors as central players in partnership with a range of other organizations, to more anarchic movements within which we might observe a counter-move to the widely observed disengagement from the polis, perhaps reflecting the anti-globalization sentiment where people feel like they want to take charge again of a life increasingly out of their hands. Considering this array of climate protection governance and social mobilization raises questions about some of the fundamental building blocks of political science, including the nature of the state and its boundaries and how collective action is mobilized and achieved. Moreover, broadening the perspective on the relevant actors involved in global environmental politics in this way illustrates and confirms that there is far more going on in terms of initiatives for climate protection than what is reflected in the daily news or when major international climate policy meetings occur (witness the 11th Conference of the Parties/First Meeting of the Members to the Kyoto Protocol in Montreal in November/December 2005). This plethora of activity also challenges the methods employed by the science community: it is much harder to track, in particular as tracing the actors involved and their relationships across different levels or sites of action is empirically challenging, and it requires a careful examination of the ends that these efforts try to serve, including an assessment of how much is for the express purpose of climate protection and the other ends which are being met through the mantra of climate protection. In addition, difficult questions about the impacts of such initiatives—how much reduction in emissions is being achieved and the criteria on which

success and failure should and can be judged—remain largely unanswered, an issue to which we return below.

The Nature of Multi-Scalar Governance for Climate Protection

In line with emerging work in the field of public policy, the papers in this special issue illustrate how as the “territorial order of modern government” implodes,⁵ we are forced to confront not only how policy is made and implemented, but the political arenas, institutional arrangements and governing networks within which such processes take place. This implies that in order to recognize how, where and why climate protection governance is taking place, it is necessary to rethink the boundaries and nature of the polity. Historically, the framework for the organization of political life within which global environmental politics takes place has been considered as the nested tiers of global governance, nation-states, and (sometimes) regional and local governments.⁶ This in turn has led to an historical focus on international negotiations and national implementation, which in turn has led to attention being placed on only part of the “greenhouse gas emissions” problem, primarily focused on large-scale emitters and the use of economic instruments and technical fixes in response. These approaches have their place, but are less able to address emissions from other sources, sources which are obscured at the national and international level, such as those which arise from the planning of urban areas for car dependence, or the design of buildings without account of passive solar energy or future changing climates in mind, or indeed of individual behaviors, and changing cultural ideas about what is comfortable, convenient and clean.⁷

As the papers illustrate, climate governance at different levels and through different arenas can achieve different policy goals through the use of different forms of influence, regulation and sanction. In this sense, an approach to climate protection governance which recognizes its multi-scalar and networked nature is not only conceptually necessary but also an empirical reality. For example, at the international level policy-makers negotiate rules for international emission reduction mechanisms (like CDM), whereas at the national level they can set federal standards of efficiency, or provide incentives for R&D, whereas at sub-national levels decision-makers can implement transportation planning measures, renewable energy production, or develop carbon governance schemes. In addition through processes of learning and lobbying taking place in transnational networks, new norms about what the climate protection challenge is and how it should be addressed are being forged. While regional initiatives and national policies have tended to focus on emissions from the industrial and energy sectors (Betsill), the papers in this special issues show that in

5. Hajer 2003, 183.

6. Bulkeley 2005.

7. Shove 2003.

order to gain purchase on the other sectors from which emissions are generated, or through which carbon sinks are developed, multiple levels of government and arenas of governance are required (Aall et al., Dilling, Mander). Thus, through multiple framings of the climate protection problem and the use of different governance instruments and approaches, different state and nonstate actors—pro and con a given strategy—are being mobilized, creating distinct politics and a differentiated and fragmented landscape of policy implementation and contestation.

Although Betsill's paper supports the use of a multi-level governance framework for analyzing this more complex picture of climate governance, she rejects any simplistic interpretation which neatly stacks one scale of policy intervention on top of another. Echoing the increasing realization within the study of Global Environmental Politics and reflecting historical insights from environmental policy-making in federalist systems like the United States, the papers in this issue confirm a move away from a notion of lower levels of governments merely as "implementers" of higher-level government policies. While regional organizations (Betsill) and national governments (Aall et al., Bode et al., Walker et al.) as much as emerging carbon markets (Dilling) require an "implementation infrastructure," the papers also move us toward a more complex understanding in which climate protection policy can originate at any level but requires a certain degree of integration with efforts at other levels. As Bulkeley and Betsill⁸ have found in their studies of local communities in Europe, Australia and the US (also reflected in the papers by Aall et al., Mander and Moser in this issue), local initiatives in emission reductions can produce policy innovation and leadership, but most can only go so far if actors at that level do not have the power to affect decision-making at other levels. The papers illustrate how in the realpolitik of climate protection this need to act across multiple arenas of governance at different scales—large regions (e.g., NAFTA), sub-national regions (e.g., England's North West), municipalities and communities—is being recognized. They demonstrate empirically that these arenas are increasingly being invoked by policy-makers as sites for intervention for climate protection. However, this process is not uncontested as, for example, different coalitions mobilize to object to the resolution of climate protection policy regionally, as in the case of wind farms (Mander), and how differences across regional coalitions, in this case NAFTA (Betsill), militate against the development of effective climate change action at their level of influence.

Given the myriad of activities which are taking place in the name of climate protection, and the importance of actors at different levels and in different arenas in shaping the potential effectiveness of these initiatives, the question arises as to whether more "joined up" governance for climate protection is either possible or desirable. The increasing presence of networked forms of climate governance—among municipalities, some regions, and between corpo-

8. Bulkeley and Betsill 2003; and Bulkeley and Betsill 2005.

rate and sub-national government actors—suggests that some degree of coordination horizontally is seen as desirable by participants. Equally, there is some evidence that integration between levels of government (Aall et al., Betsill) in pursuit of climate protection is taking place, perhaps providing the basis for the facilitation of “climate friendly” behavior through the use of mandatory and voluntary instruments from the “top down” while providing policy innovations and a sense of political mobilization from the “bottom up.” Such coordinated activities may be desirable in terms of offering the much sought after “level playing field” for the business sector and for their efficiency. As Working Group 3 of the IPCC argued in 2001, internationally coordinated and nationally cross-sectorally integrated efforts may be more cost-effective compared to their uncoordinated, un-integrated alternatives because of the reduction in transaction costs, time efficiencies, and opportunities to build economies of scale.⁹ However, given that the logical extension of the call for greater integration in policy for climate protection might mean—given the scope and range of the issue—integrating everything with everything else, efficiency may be lost as the inertia of joining efforts creeps in. Equally, while calls for greater co-ordination are frequent, to paraphrase a recent speech by Klaus Töpfer, Executive Director of UNEP in 2005 in Berlin, few actually wish to be coordinated, or indeed do the coordinating. The time taken to achieve the political will required to join up policy—particularly in a complex issue area such as climate protection where several agendas are being simultaneously pursued—may be too high a price to pay for achieving action on the ground in an expedient manner. However, without such attempts to increase the interlinkage and coordination across discrete policy initiatives, levels of government and sites of climate protection action, real questions arise as to the overall effectiveness of a fragmented attempt at governing this global issue.

Implications and Outlook: Quo Vadis Future Climate Governance?

The papers brought together in this special issue—although focused on Europe and North America—illustrate the diversity and range of actions being undertaken in the name of climate protection. The question is no longer one of what is happening beyond Kyoto, but rather what does it mean? As Walker et al. ask in their paper, is all this activity adding up to anything concrete, and how should such initiatives be evaluated? What should be the balance between evaluating these dispersed actions in terms of emission reductions and in terms of the wider other goals they might seek to address? Moser also reminds us that the emergence of widespread movements (or scaled-up efforts) is never assured. So, where are we at present, and *quo vadis*?

One empirical answer we find from this collection is that over the past few years, climate governance has effectively been taken out of (or at least beyond)

9. IPCC 2001.

the hands of international negotiators. However history will judge the impact of this diversification in governance, it is surely less controllable than through traditional, hierarchical forms of authority. What are the implications of this development? Maybe the inclusion of a greater number of actors at many more sites of action will increase the chances for policy innovation, or indeed of “policy surprises.” Maybe the multiplication of efforts will lead to quicker policy progress and change. On the other hand, the ad hoc development of multiple schemes and initiatives may lead to a situation of policy chaos, one which might make the implementation of climate protection more expensive than if done in a concerted, coordinated manner. As might be expected, the papers in this collection provide a diversity of clues to this intriguing set of questions. For some, action beyond the coordinated system of international climate change governance is taking place with some degree of success (Bode et al., Moser), while for others, the implementation of schemes for climate protection may work only in the context of a joined up system of multilevel governance (Aall et al., Betsill, Mander).

The multiplication and diversification of actors and sites of action also raises questions of responsibility: if climate protection becomes everyone’s responsibility, does it end up being no one’s? What is the role of the nation state in being held to account for its actions or inactions? And how do we ensure, measure, and—if necessary—enforce accountability in other initiatives undertaken by actors outside the state? The empirical answer to the question of responsibility appears to be that a multi-scale, multi-actor vision of responsibility for climate protection is beginning to be realized. In fact, one may argue that the involvement of many—wherever they may be situated—is not only appropriate but necessary to manage this global, multi-faceted problem. Of course, as with any commons problem, the danger of free-riding is real, yet better (if always imperfect) rules of engagement, performance and accountability can be instituted to lessen the risk of the tragedy of the commons.¹⁰ The proliferation of actors, however, is not unusual at this stage of a large-scale societal transformation process, and as the pioneers and early adopters gain momentum, even later adopters and laggards eventually come along.¹¹ The bigger challenges may lie in: (a) the very real danger of waning long-term commitment given the multi-generational challenge that climate change is; (b) realizing a sufficiently comprehensive system of climate governance and associated societal transformations in time to prevent catastrophic climate change; and (c) managing the turbulent changes that accompany such deep societal transformations without major negative unintended side-effects.¹²

Finally, the multiplication of nonstate actors across different scales and networks is having an impact on how climate protection is being conceptual-

10. Dietz et al. 2003.

11. Rogers 2003.

12. Kemp and Rotmans 2004; Moser and Dilling 2004; and Raskin et al. 2002.

ized, framed, and debated within policy circles and in the interested public at large. Several of the papers (e.g., Betsill, Moser, Walker et al.) discuss how the mobilization of different actors requires finding common languages, and common visions of what is to be achieved. What we observe is the emergence of many parallel discourses, for example, linking climate to sustainability, or climate and social justice. In some instances, changing frames and debates may make the governance of climate protection easier as more people are brought to the table, more actors are being engaged, and more hands, hearts, and heads are brought to bear on a complex problem. In others, governance may become more difficult and time-consuming, as building consensus around problem definitions and policy solutions have to account for an increasing number of related concerns. In either case, the contributions to this special issue demonstrate that governance and social action for climate protection is taking place beyond Kyoto. The task ahead is for the academic community to grasp the implications of this for both the future of our disciplines, and of our worlds.

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