Political Spaces of Climate Governance

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Abstract

As climate change has become more salient and contentious as a political issue through the proclamation of Green Deal agendas and launch of public investment programs based on 'green' conditionality, two major trends are discernible that affect its negotiation as a policy problem. One is a dynamic broadly captured by the concept of politicization, defined as an increased scope and contentiousness of controversy on policies related to climate change. Another is an increased variability of agendas and discursive framings of climate policy, as a result of climate policy integration and mainstreaming into a broad range of areas that in itself becomes an increasing subject of political contestation. This trend is reinforced more recently through exogenous shocks such as the Covid pandemic, the war in Ukraine and conditions described in the literature as turbulence.

Against this background, a challenge for extant research is to investigate how climate governance frameworks with different degrees of policy stability – as observed in a comparison between the EU and US – respond to the expanding and more variable politics of climate change. The project seeks to promote ongoing research in this regard by harnessing a theoretical framework centered on the concept of political space. This approach is proposed to relate three components of climate governance that include aspects of scope and dimensionality: namely, its policy space as the evolution of political agendas proposed to deal with the climate crisis; the institutional space as the format of institutional venues that are selected as relevant for negotiating policy issues; and the discursive space evolving from the depth and issue dimensions of controversy between involved policy-making agents and coalitions. In its empirical part, the project investigates the launch of 'green' recovery packages in the EU and US, the evolution of Green Deal agendas in response to the challenge of the Covid-19 pandemic and recent energy and security crises, and the conflictual interaction between trade negotiations and climate action.

(1) Objectives & Questions

Empirical points of departure:

A key point of departure is the observation of an expansion, diversification and increased contestation of climate governance frameworks. Major events behind this dynamic are

- the proclamation of Green New Deal agendas and their adjustment to events of exogenous shock;
- the adoption of green industrial policy packages in response to the Covid-19 crisis and war in Ukraine;
- The emergence of trade-related issues and conflicts in climate governance frameworks and related dynamics of 'climatization' of trade negotiations; and finally,
- dynamics of politicization around the issue of climate change as a results of increased salience and re-framing of political agendas related to targets of climate action.

Embedding in ongoing research debates:

The project relates to emerging research debates that broadly revolve around the interaction between the politics- and policy-making dimension of climate governance, more specifically

- The relevance of *policy stability* compared to sources of disruption and *political conflict* as vectors of policy-making on climate change;
- Dynamics of *climate policy integration* and mainstreaming, particularly through the adoption of recovery packages and green industrial policy;
- *Comparative perspectives* on climate policy-making and its political contestation in the multi-level settings of the EU and United States.

Objectives:

Key objectives of the project are to

(1) Trace and evaluate the expansion and diversification of climate governance frameworks in the contexts identified above;
(2) Draw conclusions about the role of policy stability and disruption for policy-making progress on climate change.

Research Questions:

(1) How do vectors of policy-making stability and conflictual disruption interact through the evolution of climate governance frameworks?
(2) What conclusions can be drawn about the effects of these vectors on policy-making progress against climate change?

(2) Theoretical Framework

The key concept proposed to relate vectors of policy stability and change is the political space of climate governance, defined as the variable and politically contested set of institutional, political and discursive settings through which climate change is addressed and negotiated as a policy issue.

The theoretical model gauges **vectors of expansion or contraction** within three dimensions of climate governance; namely, its

(1) *policy space*, defined through agendas defining the scope and priority of climate targets through policy images and frames, particularly by executive agents at the macro-political level;

(2) *institutional space* as the set of relevant administrative and legislative arenas involved in the negotiation and adoption of climate policies, primarily at the level of specific policy subsystems;

(3) *discursive space* as the depth and dominant logics of contestation arising from interactions between relevant actor coalitions involved in processes of negotiation within and between these policy subsystems.
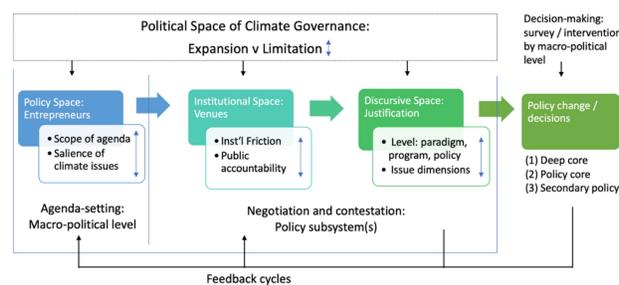

Fig. 1. Overview of the theoretical model

This theoretical mode is understood as a heuristic framework for approaching the research agenda, to be specified further for specific research designs and outputs.

(3) Research Program

Comparative perspective EU – USA

The research program focuses on the EU and US as entities with strongly contrasting records of policy-making stability and disruptive policy change associated with deep-seated political conflict.

Cases and topics for the project include:

(1) Green Deal agenda evolution in response to exogenous shock;
(2) Green recovery and industrial policy programs;
(3) 'Climatization' of trade negotiations and conflicts;
(4) Climate policy integration as a cross-cutting issue.

(4) Methods & Data

Methods applied for the project (in order of relevance):

(1) Quantitative content analysis using computer-based coding,
(2) Qualitative document analysis,
(3) Descriptive inference (classification, typologization),
(4) Semi-structured interviews (experts, policy-makers, stakeholders).

Data sources include (in order of relevance):

(1) Policy-making documents (executive institutions, agencies)
(2) Legislative positions and procedures (EP, USC)
(3) Political speeches and statements (SoU, SoEU, public appearances)
(4) Position papers (CSOs, stakeholder organizations)
(5) Think tank analysis and evaluation

Cooperation with CSS Working Group:
„EUropean Dimension of Green Transformations"

https://www.wiso.unihamburg.de/en/forschung/forschungszentren/css/css-research/working-groups/european-dimension-of-green-transformations.html

(5) Results / Work in Progress

Starting 07/23

(6) Take-home Message

The pursuit of Green Deal and green industrial policy agendas fundamentally changes the boundaries of climate governance frameworks and the politics of climate change. The stability of policy linkages and decision-making venues remain key for policy-making progress to achieve decarbonization.

Further information and updates:

Homepage at UHH (english):
https://www.wiso.uni-hamburg.de/en/fachbereich-sowi/ueber-den-fachbereich/personen/wendler-frank.html
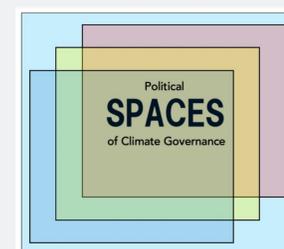
Personal Homepage:
www.frankwendler.eu

Project presentation on the CSS website:
https://www.wiso.unihamburg.de/en/forschung/forschungszentren/css/nachrichten-auflistung/2023-news/20230720-wendler-project-launch.html

Entry on DFG / Gepris website:
https://gepris.dfg.de/gepris/projekt/441493451?language=en

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