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SOCIETY RESEARCH

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 political framing and contestation. 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 range of areas that in itself becomes an increasing subject of political contestation. This trend is reinforced more recently through green industrial policy packages launched in response to exogenous shocks such as the Covid pandemic, the war in Ukraine and a more adverse global environment.

Against this background, a challenge for extant research is to investigate how climate governance frameworks with different legacies of policy stability – observed as strongly contrasting in 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 presenting a theoretical framework centered on the concept of political space. This term is harnessed 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 their interaction. 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 geopoliticization of climate governance through its inclusion in trade and investment agendas.

(1) Objectives & Questions

Empirical points of departure:

A key point of departure is the observation of an expansion, diversification and increased contestation of climate change policy-making and related governance frameworks. Major aspects of this dynamic are

- the proclamation of Green New Deal agendas and their adjustment to exogenous shocks;
- the adoption of green industrial policy packages in response to the Covid-19 crisis and war in Ukraine;
- The inclusion of net-zero targets into trade and investment policies and related dynamics of 'geopoliticization' of climate policy; and finally,
- dynamics of politicization around the issue of climate change as a political issue as a result of its increased salience and contestation.

Related research debates:

The project relates to emerging research debates that address the interaction between the politics and policy 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 contestation in the multi-level settings of the EU and United States.

Objectives:

Key objectives of the project are to

- Trace and evaluate the expansion and diversification of climate governance frameworks in the context outlined above;
- Draw conclusions about the role of policy stability and disruption for policy-making progress on climate change.

Research Questions:

- How do vectors of policy-making stability and conflictual disruption interact through the evolution of climate governance frameworks?
- What conclusions can be drawn about the effects of these interactions on the politics and policy-making of climate change?

(2) Theoretical Framework

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

Dynamics of change within these three dimensions are reflected in the theoretical model as **vectors of expansion or contraction** of its

- (1) policy space**, defined through agendas that present policy images and frames for climate action, 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 these processes of negotiation within and between these policy subsystems.

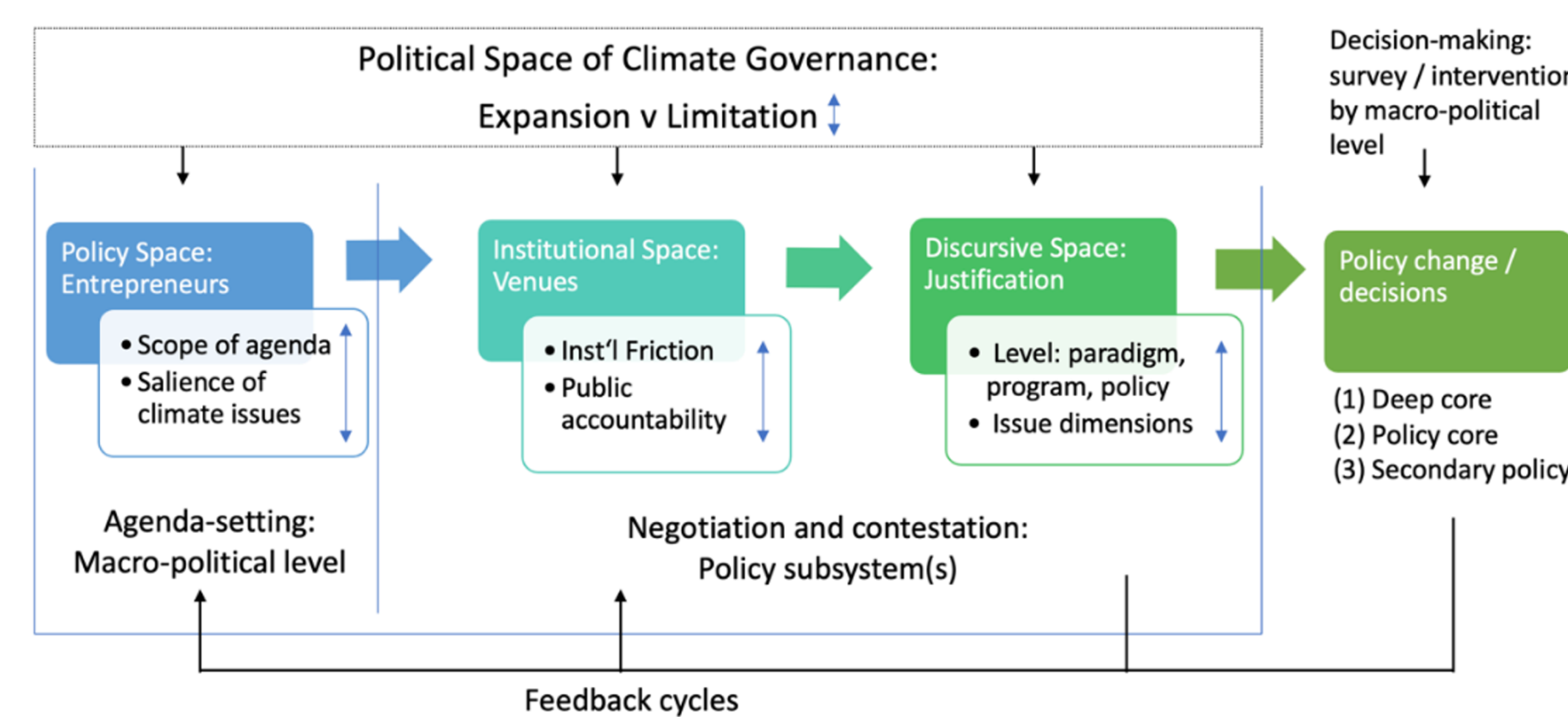


Fig. 1. Overview of the theoretical model

This theoretical model is understood as a heuristic framework for approaching the research agenda, to be specified further for specific application to empirical cases (e.g., Punctuated Equilibrium and ACF).

(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 change associated with deep-seated political conflict.

Cases and topics for the project include:

- Green Deal agenda evolution in response to exogenous shock;
- Green recovery and industrial policy programs;
- 'Geopoliticization' of climate policy through trade & investment agendas
- Climate Policy Integration as a cross-cutting issue.

(4) Methods & Data

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

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

Data sources include (in order of relevance):

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

Cooperation with CSS Working Group:

„The EUropean Dimension of Green Transformations“

<https://www.wiso.uni-hamburg.de/en/forschung/forschungszentren/css/cs-s-research/working-groups/european-dimension-of-green-transformations.html>

(5) Results / Work in Progress

Starting 01/24

Book (2024): Climate Agendas and Instability

Routledge Focus in Comparative Politics Series, published October 2024

Working Paper (2024): Political Spaces of Climate Governance

Published in the CSS Working Paper series, No. 10, July 2024

Work in progress I: Climate Politics and Text-as-Data

ECPR Joint Sessions Workshop on Climate Linkages and TADA (co-directed with Karina Shyrokykh)

Call for Papers: Evolving Politics of the EGD: New Perspectives Using Text as Data (GreenDealNET)

Work in progress II: Climate Policy Integration

Conference papers (ECSA-C, ECPR SG-EU) on theoretical dimension: process & politics of CPI

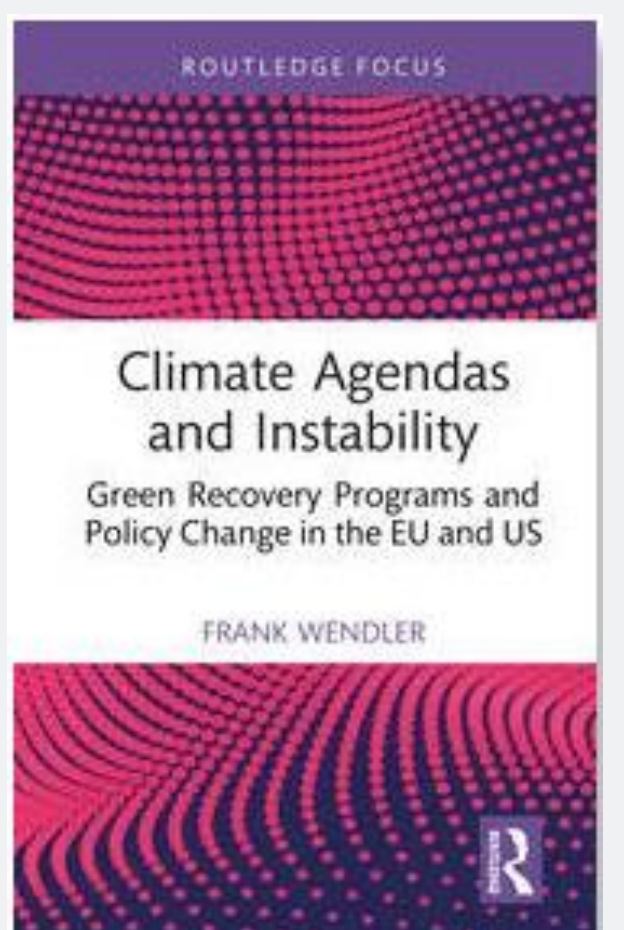
Contribution to GreenDealNET workshop: EU Green Deal and Climate Policy Integration

Forthcoming Special Issue project and article submission

Work in progress III: Geopolitics of the EGD (trade / security)

Paper proposed for EUSA 2025 conference – related by evaluating NZIA and CDIP

Paper project on trade-security nexus in trade strategies and negotiations of the EU



(6) Take-home Message

The political boundaries of climate governance are changing through its definition as a cross-cutting issue based on concepts of a green deal, but also more variable framing as a component of industrial, investment and trade policies. The more variable framing of climate action becomes a key factor not just for policy outcomes, but also its salience and contestation as a political issue, resulting in a more variegated landscape of political conflict relating to climate change. Understanding this variation is key for explaining progress on policies to achieve net-zero goals.

Further information and updates:

Profile 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 CSS website:

<https://www.wiso.uni-hamburg.de/en/forschung/forschungszentren/css/nachrichten-aufstellung/2023-news/20230720-wendler-project-launch.html>

Project Entry on DFG / Gepris website:

<https://gepris.dfg.de/gepris/projekt/441493451?language=en>

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