

Climate Governance and Urban Planning (Book Review)



Review by Deborah Heinen (email), Affiliated with HafenCity Universität, Hamburg, Germany and a regional planner in the Hamburg metropolitan area.

Introduction

Climate change has given new urgency to a challenge that urban planning has faced for decades: how to implement transit-connected communities. Emissions can be reduced by increasing densities and diversifying uses around rapid transit stations. Yet aligning local land-use decisions with transit investments can be challenging in many urbanized areas.

Climate Governance and Urban Planning - Implementing Low-Carbon Development Patterns (2023) examines this implementation challenge from a governance perspective. By comparing the rules-in-use in three metropolitan regions (Metro Vancouver, Puget Sound, and Stuttgart), the book offers unique

insights into improving the odds of implementing a low-carbon future in urbanized areas. Overall, the book makes a compelling case to planners and policy makers for reforming planning legislation to enable coordination of actions across sectors and levels of government.

Summary

Climate Governance and Urban Planning unfolds the complex governance challenge of building transit-connected communities in an effort to reduce emissions. One strategy to reduce emissions is to increase densities and mix of uses around rapid transit stops. This type of low-carbon development pattern requires land use and transit decision-makers to work together when identifying suitable locations for rapid transit investments and increased densities. Working together is not always easy as federal, state, regional, county and local governments pursue their own strategies. Based on over 80 interviews with practitioners, the book offers insights from three metropolitan regions on how collaboration can be successful across levels and sectors of government. By looking at the application of various planning laws, the book shows how collaboration across multiple sectors and levels of government can be fostered by the rules-in-use.

The book is structured into nine chapters. The first three chapters introduce the topic of governing low-carbon development patterns. Within this context, the rules-in-use are introduced as a frequently overlooked dimension of climate governance arrangements. The focus on rules-in-use has not been common in climate governance research as trust and leadership are frequently emphasized to explain plan implementation. By focusing on the rules-in-use the book takes a unique perspective to understand the conditions that foster intergovernmental collaboration on achieving joint objectives such as reducing emissions.

From a governance perspective, the book dives deep into the rules-in-use in three metropolitan regions: Metro Vancouver (Canada), Puget Sound (USA) and Stuttgart (Germany) regions. Chapters 4 to 6 tell the stories of the three regions: For each region, *Climate Governance and Urban Planning* reviews the state-level support for climate actions and the role of the regional planning organizations in fostering transit-connected communities. Subsequently, the book discusses the decision-making that encompasses new regional rapid transit lines. Lastly, local efforts to rezone are reviewed for two suburban rapid transit stations in each

region. The three regions provide a wealth of detail on how transit-connected communities are planned and implemented under different planning laws and different state climate action agendas. A detailed comparison of the three approaches can be found in Chapters 7 and 8. A primary difference between the three regions is the role of the regional planning organization in facilitating coordinated land use and transit actions. The book concludes with some general observations for urban planning and climate governance.

Analysis and evaluation

The findings of the books are based on almost 80 interviews with planners at the local, county, regional and state levels. The book documents the challenges practitioners face when creating transit-connected communities. The book's central theme is the question of how we can integrate decision-making across multiple levels and sectors of government. Implementing climate action plans in general and transit-connected communities in particular, rely on the capacity of multiple organizations to find common ground and mutually agreeable solutions. The book draws particular attention to the governance challenge of ensuring integrated decision-making between local governments and transit providers. Particularly for transit-connected communities, the book illustrates how crucial it can be to ensure land use changes and transit investments occur in the same location. If there is a spatial mismatch between transit investment and density increase, the new rapid transit line might face low-ridership or a newly densified neighborhood might face increased traffic. Thus, it becomes crucial that local land use changes and transit investments are spatially aligned to ensure neighborhoods benefit and long-term feasibility. Strategic planning as part of a Regional Growth Strategy can provide the vision and context for collaboration between local governments and transit providers.

The book tells the story of three metropolitan regions that operate under different federal and state planning-enabling legislation. From a governance perspective, the book presents three metropolitan regions and how the planning law uniquely positions the regional planning agency to facilitate integrated decision-making. The book unpacks the complex interplay of actors at the local, county, regional and state levels in achieving low-carbon development patterns for each metropolitan region. The book illustrates the curious integrating mechanisms created under state planning laws that ensure the accountability of local and transit stakeholders without creating command-and-control-type settings.

Conclusion

Implementation is at the heart of the book “Climate Governance and Urban Planning”. Plan implementation has been a research topic in urban planning for decades. The book makes a compelling case that plan implementation is closely linked to the quality of the governance arrangements in metropolitan regions. These governance arrangements are established by the rules-in-use, which prescribe actors’ roles, their degrees of dependency, and define integrating procedures. Hence, implementing climate actions in general and transit-connected urban centers in particular, depends on the rules-in-use created under planning enabling legislations or through intergovernmental agreements.

The book inspires policy makers, planners and students to analyze and review the rules-in-use in their metropolitan regions and to ask critical questions as to whether there is a need to reform the planning enabling legislation to enable spatially aligned actions by multiple stakeholders.

More details on the book Climate Governance and Urban Planning can be found here.

Regions Cities Industry Webinar

A webinar on the book is scheduled for 29.03.2023, 17.00 GMT, 18.00 CET. More details on the webinar and how to register can be found at RSA Regions Cities Industry Webinar Series. The webinar is free and open to all to join. No current RSA is required to join the live webinar. The webinar recording will be made available in the RSA Members Lounge.

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