



In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
Sheryl Musgrove

will defend her dissertation

**In-Sync, Out-of-Sync Cities and their States: An Examination of
Subnational Climate Change Policy in the Northwest States of
Washington and Idaho**

Wednesday, April 7, 2021

1:00 p.m. (MST)

Virtual Meeting Link: <https://asu.zoom.us/j/87307980217>

Faculty, students, and the public are invited.

Supervisory Committee:

Sonja Klinsky, Ph.D., Chair

Christopher Boone, Ph.D., Member

Abigail York, Ph.D., Member

Daniel Bodansky, J.D., Member

Abstract

Despite the urgent need to take action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, there has been a striking absence of national climate change leadership in the United States. In this vacuum, the need for action at the subnational level, and particularly at the municipal level, has become essential. But cities are not free agents. Instead, they have only the authority granted to them by their state. Thus, not surprisingly, there are many cities taking climate action consistent with, or in-sync with, their state. However, there are other cities that are taking climate action inconsistent with, or out-of-sync with, their state. These out-of-sync cities are either taking extensive climate action even though they are located in a state that is hostile to climate action; or are not taking any appreciable climate action even though they

are located in a state that is strongly supportive of climate action. This study examines this in-sync, out-of-sync phenomenon using a multilevel, in-depth case study approach to determine the multilevel dynamics influencing whether a city is taking climate action that is in- or out-of-sync with their state, including the drivers of and barriers to municipal climate action and the strategies cities are using to address and overcome barriers. Understanding these drivers, barriers, and strategies will help to provide a path forward to accelerate the reduction of municipal GHG emissions.

To focus on the multi-level dynamics of the city-state relationship, this study compared two states at opposite ends of the climate change mitigation spectrum—Idaho, a state that was intentionally not taking any action to mitigate climate change, and Washington, which was affirmatively and aggressively taking action to mitigate climate change—and two cities within each of these states that also were at opposite ends of the climate change mitigation spectrum—for Idaho, Pocatello and Boise; for Washington, Spokane and Seattle. The use of this in-depth case approach from a multilevel perspective highlighted nuances and variances in the drivers, barriers, and strategies in these states and cities that would have otherwise been overlooked.

Political affiliation and ideology were the most significant factors influencing state and city climate policy and whether a city was in-sync or out-of-sync with its state. Specifically, the progressive leaning state and cities were engaging in climate action and the conservative leaning state and cities were hostile toward, and not engaging in, climate action. Although this result was expected, this study also revealed many nuances that were not. For example, the strength of ideological leaning in a city could trump the influence of state authority. Ideological leaning also impacted whether non-state actors acted as a driver or a barrier to climate action, with the exception of the state-level impact of the business sector, which acted as a barrier to climate action across the board, regardless of the state's ideological leaning.

The study also revealed some common strategies that cities were using to respond to perceived and actual barriers to taking climate action. How, and whether, those strategies were deployed was, again, linked to the ideological leaning of the cities. Thus, for example, the progressive cities were engaging in extensive policy experimentation, but the transitioning and conservative cities were not. Another example, co-benefits, also manifested in different ways, depending on ideological leaning: in the progressive city located in the conservative state, the city appeared to be using co-benefits as an affirmative strategy to avoid scrutiny from its state; in the conservative city located in the conservative state, climate-related benefits were an incidental and unintentional by-product of actions taken to meet the city's needs. Finally, the results revealed that although policy champions can have a significant positive influence in pushing a city forward on climate action, this influence could only be realized if the champion has the support of (or at least lack of opposition from) the majority of elected city leadership. Otherwise, the individual was only a "potential" but unrealized "champion."

The findings of this study thus highlight some of the important drivers and barriers that cities face in addressing climate change in a multilevel setting, and how the interplay between those drivers and barriers—such as political affiliation/ideology, state authority, and non-state actors—can help or hinder municipal-level progress in taking climate action. The findings also reveal the strategies that cities are employing to overcome the barriers they face and to help accelerate their progress in addressing climate change. The findings thus contribute to the understanding of why and how cities take climate action, and how barriers to municipal climate action can be overcome. This understanding is essential in providing a path forward for municipal climate action and accelerating the reduction of municipal GHG emissions.