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1

Promises and Concerns of the Urban Century

Increasing Agency and Contested Empowerment

JEROEN VAN DER HEIJDEN, HARRIET BULKELEY, AND CHIARA CERTOMÀ

Stressing the relevance of urbanization in social, economic, and environmental developments, the twenty-first century is frequently referred to as 'the first urban century' or simply 'the urban century' (Gilbert et al. 2009; Hall & Pfeiffer, 2013; Heynen, 2014; Nijkamp & Kourtit, 2013). The numbers speak for themselves: as of 2008 the world's urban population was larger than the world's rural population. By 2050, some 6 billion people are expected to live in cities and urban areas – twice as many as in 2000. Most rapid urbanization will take place in Asia and Africa, where urban populations are expected to grow from around 30 per cent at the start of the century to more than 50 per cent by mid-century (UN-HABITAT, 2016). Already more than 70 per cent of global gross domestic product (GDP) is generated in cities, and with increasing urbanization cities will become even more dominant in the world economy (McKinsey Global Institute, 2011; World Bank, 2009b). Some 70 per cent of global resources are consumed in cities (including energy and potable water) and they account for 70 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions – mainly as a result of the high consumerist lifestyle that characterizes modern urban life (Dodman, 2009; UN, 2016).

The social, economic, and environmental gains and costs of urbanization are not spread equally across the world, however. Half of global GDP is generated in fewer than 400 cities predominantly in the global north (McKinsey Global Institute, 2011; World Bank, 2009b). Problems such as urban poverty, slums, air pollution, overabstraction of drinking water, heat waves, and flooding are more persistent in the Global South than in the Global North (Hughes, Chu, & Mason, 2018; Mitlin & Satterthwaite, 2013; Watson, 2009). And in both the Global North and the Global South, inequalities between the haves and the have-nots are vast and rapidly growing (World Bank Group, 2016). Yet, the ongoing urbanization and redevelopment of cities holds also much potential for reduced resource consumption and waste production, as well as opportunities for a more just and equal distribution of the yields and cost of economic and social development (Bulkeley, 2013; Castán

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Broto, 2017; Hughes, 2017; Van der Heijden, 2017). In other words, not only can we *imagine* urban futures with greater well-being of individuals and societies, but also, given the scale of projected urbanization and redevelopment there are real possibilities to *achieve* urban futures with greater well-being of individuals and societies (Drydyk, 2013; Ibrahim & Alkire, 2007; Wright, 2010).

It is for these reasons that urban responses to climate change have become increasingly significant over the last decades and will remain critical to achieve equally distributed social and economic progress (Bulkeley & Betsill, 2003; Bulkeley, Castán Broto, & Gareth, 2012; Bulkeley, Edwards, & Fuller, 2014; Cohen, 2017; Van der Heijden, 2016). Reflecting this, a burgeoning literature has emerged on the politics and governance of urban futures, particularly in the area of climate change adaptation and mitigation. This literature has a strong focus on the opportunities and constraints of innovative and experimental policies and governance instruments that have emerged since the early 1990s. This work has positioned the 'urban' as an important arena for Earth System Governance and dominant urban actors – municipal governments and the transnational associations which they have formed – as critical agents of change in the transition towards a low carbon and resilient future. However, while other domains of environmental governance have come to explore the multiple actors involved in governing climate change and the range of forms of agency involved, within the field of urban studies of climate change there has been a more limited engagement with the diverse agents and novel forms of agency that have engaged in urban responses. Beyond city governments, state and regional public authorities have also been critical to the urban governing of climate change, and there is a growing involvement of non-governmental organizations, citizen collectives, transnational municipal networks, development banks, philanthropic organizations, and businesses.

As these new agents of change have started to engage with the urban governance of climate change, new questions concerning their roles and responsibilities are emerging. Central to these issues are matters of their legitimacy (to whom are such agents answerable?) and the extent to which they are able to empower citizens and communities to undertake transformative action for climate change. While it can be tempting to equate novel forms of collective action as more likely to support such transformative action, the extent to which such initiatives are truly accessible and which forms of community come to benefit need to be further reflected upon. Equally, neo-liberal drivers in areas such as smart cities might increase inequalities between citizens rather than reduce them, and through innovative urban climate governance interventions governments may bypass their constitutional limits and affect actors at scales or levels where they normally do not have jurisdiction. At the same time, while the move of corporations and financial institutions into urban climate governance might raise concerns about their motivations and transparency,

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there is the potential for such initiatives to leverage the forms of resources required to develop capacity and empower others to take action. We need to engage with these potentially contradictory dynamics if the full implications of urban climate governance are to be recognized.

In sum, it is now evident that urban responses to climate change involve a diverse range of actors as well as forms of agency that cross traditional boundaries, and which have diverse consequences for (dis)empowering different social groups – helping or hampering them to increase their well-being. Friction between novel forms of agency, new agents of change and (dis)empowerment is a missing focus in existing scholarship on urban climate futures. This edited book addresses this knowledge gap and raises important issues for how we understand urban climate responses. It does so by drawing together insights from a wide range of countries, spanning the Global North to the Global South. The book is unique in its ambition and reach. It brings together 11 chapters by renowned urban climate governance scholars from around the globe. These chapters all critically assess the promises and limitations of increasing agency in urban climate governance. They build on solid empirical knowledge gained from case studies in the Global North and Global South. In doing so it sheds a much-needed critical new light on the existing literature and advances the current state of knowledge on urban climate policy and governance.

This book is part of the Earth System Governance (ESG) project, the world's largest social science research network of governance and climate change. Launched in 2009, ESG is a global research alliance connecting some 400 scholars who work on a range of themes, including urban climate governance.[1] In this book, we systematically cover the key research findings that have resulted from the project and related research activities. In this introductory chapter, we begin with setting out the key themes of the book – the politics of urban futures, increasing agency in urban climate policy and governance, and contested empowerment in urban transformations. We discuss some of the puzzles they raise for policy, practice, and academia, and propose a critical analysis of the heterogeneous forms of agency shaping the politics of urban futures. From here on, we briefly introduce the chapters that make up the main body of this book and how they relate to the broader ESG scholarship and other relevant communities and work in the field.

The Politics of Urban Climate Futures

Considering the urban politics and governance of climate change, much has happened since the 1990s (Bulkeley & Betsill, 2003; Jayne & Ward, 2017;

[1] See further www.earthsystemsgovernance.org (accessed 23 October 2017).

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Parnell, 2016; Romero-Lankao et al., 2018). Three broad and related trends stand out that, as we will explain in what follows, shape the politics of urban climate futures: the combination of decentralization and liberalization, a growing ambition of local governments to bypass their national governments in urban climate policy and governance, and increasing recognition of the roles of local governments and local communities in global climate governance.

First, around the globe, two related developments have given local governments and local communities more influence in urban politics and the governance of local matters: decentralization and liberalization (Hodge, 2000; Taylor, 2013). Where local governments were once little more than the service-delivery branch of national governments and tasked with implementing national policies, they are increasingly expected to deliver local services themselves in an effective and efficient manner, and have to be transparent about their actions and be fully accountable for these – for instance through 'smart city' rankings and urban climate indexes (López-Ruiz, Alfaro-Navarro, & Nevado-Peña, 2014). In similar vein, the delivery of public services – waste collection, energy supply, and so on – is more and more tasked to the private sector and local communities through various forms of delegation, contracting out, and privatization (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992; Van der Heijden, 2011). This allows local governments and local communities to tailor urban policies to local needs, and use local resources for local service delivery.

Second, since the 1990s, local governments have been observed to adopt targets for reduced greenhouse gas emissions, energy consumption, and waste production well beyond the targets set by the nation states they are in (Acuto & Rayner, 2016; C40 Research Team & Arup, 2014; McKendry, 2018; Reckien et al., 2014). And since the 2000s, cities have become actively involved in climate adaptation also (Harman, Taylor, & Lane, 2015; Rauken, Mydske, & Winsvold, 2015; Rockefeller Foundation, 2013; Tanner et al., 2009). They are found actively involved in urban climate governance experiments that bring together local governments, private actors and civil society actors in formal and structured processes of developing, demonstrating and trialling new forms of authority and governance instruments to address climate challenges at the city level (Bulkeley, Castán Broto, & Edwards, 2015; Sassen, 2015). Of course, this is not to say that whenever they do so their main motivation is to reduce the effects of global climate change. Sometimes they are found to act simply to reduce the costs of operating cities, to prevent devastating effects of local climate-change–related disasters (Lovins, 2013; Nishida, Hua, & Okamoto, 2016), or hoping that an image of local climate action will attract investors and citizens that have a 'green' orientation and will ultimately boost the economic prosperity of their city (McCann, 2013; Schragger, 2016). Whatever their motivations the scale, scope and ambition of local government involvement in global climate governance has increased since, particularly, the mid-2000s (Bai,

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Roberts, & Chen, 2010; Bulkeley, 2010). This becomes particularly evident when considering the emergence and growth of municipal networks at trans-local and international levels (Acuto & Rayner, 2016; Jayne & Ward, 2017; Jordan & Turnpenny, 2015; Lee, 2015). They allow cities to learn from each other, jointly experiment, and seek governance solutions to urban climate problems. Perhaps most importantly, they help local government to bypass their national governments in the international arena, and to raise awareness of their role in global climate governance.

Third and final, since the early 1990s there is increasing international recognition of the need to involve local governments and local communities in the politics of urban climate futures (Parnell, 2016). Already at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, local governments and communities were recognized and explicitly mentioned as an important site for climate action (UNCED, 1992). Following from this Earth Summit, international organizations such as the World Bank and the United Nations have led a range of initiatives to better understand the interactions between urbanization and climate change, with a particular focus on urbanization in the global south (UNDP, 2010, 2013; UNEP, 2007, 2011; World Bank, 2008, 2009a, 2011, 2013). Launched at the 21st Conference of the Parties (COP) in Paris, parallel climate summits for local and regional leaders have been held since that provide cities and other local actors with an opportunity to influence international climate change negotiations (Van der Heijden, 2018). Similarly, cities are a central focus of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals of 2015 (UN, 2015), and the New Urban Agenda resulting from the bi-decennial HABITAT Conference in 2016 has a strong focus on the role of cities in climate change mitigation and adaptation (United Nations, 2016).

Increasing Agency in Urban Climate Policy and Governance

It is against the backdrop of these three trends that novel agents of change and novel forms of agency engaged in governing climate change in the city have emerged. Agency is a contested concept and conceptualized differently across the social sciences (e.g. Alkire, 2008; Eisenhardt, 1989; Giddens, 1984; Sen, 1999). In a narrow understanding, agency reflects the capacity of individuals or organizations ('agents') to act independently and autonomously towards achieving desired outcomes. Social structures such as existing policy and governance arrangements for urban futures may help them achieving these goals, but are not considered to fully determine their behaviour, and may even be sources of deviance, improvisation, and entrepreneurship (Archer, 2003; Heugens & Lander, 2009). Such resistance against existing social structures may lead to changed social structures that increases the agency of some, but likely not others, which itself my lead to further

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resistance and, ultimately, change (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010; Van der Heijden & Kuhlmann, 2017). Of course, resistance may more likely result in change if agents are allowed to resist and have available social structures to resist (Parker, 2000; Stones, 2005).

In a broader understanding, agency is conceptualized as a propensity of social, socio-material, and socio-natural relations, and inhering not only in human individuals or organizations. Non-human agents (including animals, plants, and natural events) and more-than-human agency (including laws, technologies, procedures, and machines) may be considered having agency too, or, at the very least, affect the agency of humans (Gabriel, 2014; Latour, 2005; Murdoch, 2001; Swyngedouw, 2004). Floods, for example, may be considered having agency because they have 'the potential to be politically disruptive, with the ability, suitably mediated, to generate publics around it and to cast doubt on the status quo' (Donaldson et al., 2013: 611). Urban trees, on their turn, are sometimes considered to increasingly gain agency in the transition to sustainable cities, which replaces their traditional but passive aesthetic function in the urban landscape with an active and vital function in 'biogenic' or 'green' urban infrastructures (Kirkpatrick, Davison, & Daniels, 2013). Technological urban networks including water, waste collection, and communication technology, finally, may be considered to have agency as they empower those with access to it, and possibly strengthen inequalities between different groups of human agents (Leitner, Sheppard, & Sziarto, 2008).

The novel agents of change and novel forms of agency discussed in this book can be conceptualized, for simplicity, as either operating top-down, bottom-up, or mixing characteristics of both. Top-down approaches have, as highlighted before, a long history and can be traced back to the privatization of (local) public service delivery that started in the 1970s (Hodge, 2000; Van der Heijden, 2010), the 'reinventing' and decentralization of government and implementation of new public management practices since the 1980s (Hood, 1995; Osborne & Gaebler, 1992; Rondinelli, 1981), and the larger shift from government to governance that has been documented since the late 1990s (Rhodes, 1996, 2007). This all has tasked local governments with greater responsibility for achieving societally desired outcomes, including climate action, and has resulted in the involvement of a wide range of non-governmental agents in the regulation and governance of urban futures, including businesses, consultancies, universities, and research institutes (Bulkeley, 2013; Van der Heijden, 2014).

Bottom-up approaches for increased agency in urban climate policy and governance have been extensively discussed in, among others, grassroots literature (Seyfang & Haxeltine, 2012; Seyfang & Smith, 2007), civic engagement and social movement literatures (Brain, 2005; Portney & Berry, 2013), and self-governance

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and voluntary governance literatures (Acuto & Rayner, 2016; Kern & Bulkeley, 2009). It is in these literatures where we observe citizens and others to act, often purposefully, in ways that critically complement or even contrast existing urban policy and governance arrangements with an aim to ultimately change those arrangements. Typical examples are 'guerrilla gardening' and 'do-it-yourself urbanism' that make visible how small-scale interventions in urban public spaces may have long term benefits. Such interventions may initially be illicit, for example, setting up a vegetable garden on an unused plot of government land. Through phases of toleration, recognition, and enhancement the interventions may ultimately result in changed zoning laws that allow citizens to legally set up such gardens, but within certain regulatory boundaries (Finn, 2014; Hung, 2017). It is in these literatures also where we observe citizens, firms, and others to organize around a specific goal that is not yet included in urban climate policy and governance and voluntary commit to actions allowed within social structures that help to achieve it. A typical example is the global Transition Network movement, which brings together communities that seek to take, among others, climate action at local level, for instance a reduction of energy consumption through community energy projects (Brunetta & Baglione, 2013; Connors & McDonald, 2010; Smith, 2011). Another example is the organization of business interests around specific urban climate goals, for example, the emergence of Green Building Councils around the globe. These novel agents seek to support firms to increase their environmental sustainability behaviour or that of their products beyond government requirements, but do so on a paid-for basis (Van der Heijden, 2015).

Finally, mixed approaches have most clearly been captured in participatory governance literature (Brabham, 2009; Holden, 2011), collaborative governance literature (Clarke, 2016; Gollagher & Hartz-Karp, 2013), and network governance literature (Acuto & Rayner, 2016; Hughes, 2017). These literatures discuss a transition from traditional 'closed' decision-making processes towards those that involve citizens and other interested actors to different degrees – ranging from merely informing citizens, via consulting, to delegating power to citizens in urban policy and governance processes (Cheyne, 2015; Holden, 2011). By involving citizens and other relevant stakeholders in these processes their tacit knowledge can be used, diverse and competing views between agents might be bridged, and, ultimately, the outcomes of these processes may receive higher levels of acceptance (Bulkeley & Mol, 2003; Lobel, 2012). In the area of urban climate futures, these literatures are further aware of increasing collaborations between, particularly, local governments at regional, national and international level (Green, 2017; Lee, 2015). Over the years a number of these have formalized in powerful transnational municipal networks that now have a strong impact on the politics of urban climate futures, as discussed before. Three well-known networks

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are ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability (formerly named International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives), the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group, and the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy.

Contested Empowerment in Urban Transformations

Whether and to what extent has the increasing agency just described led to an increasing capacity for transformative urban climate governance? Has the overall capacity to transform urban futures in a low-carbon direction and address climate change increased also? Or, more critically, whether and to what extent has this increased agency empowered urban climate governance? Has increased agency helped to overcome some of the root causes of disempowerment? And how to gain insight and assess in this increased empowerment? As with the concept of agency, there is no shortage of definitions for and conceptualizations of the concept 'empowerment' within the social sciences (Bruce, 2007; Cornwall, 2010; Hur, 2006; Ibrahim & Alkire, 2007; Maru, 2009, 2011). It is by no means our ambition to provide a full overview of the discussions on empowerment, but a discussion of a few issues appears warranted considering the chapters that follow.

The notion of empowerment gained traction in the 1970s as an analytical construct to understand the development of individuals, organizations, and communities (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995; Wilkinson, 1998). At its most basic level, empowerment can be understood as a redistribution of power (Hur, 2006; Wilkinson, 1998). Much scholarly work in this area studies the processes and means through which marginalized and oppressed individuals and collectives gain greater control over their lives, overcome barriers, resist existing power settings, emancipate, and achieve desired outcomes (Drydyk, 2013; Maton, 2008; Pease, 2002). Distinction is then often made between individual and collective empowerment (Hur, 2006; Moulaert et al., 2005; Rogers & Singhal, 2003; Rowlands, 1997). Individual empowerment concerns notions of self-determination and the capacity and competence to shape one's own life according to one's own desires, which includes being able to overcome social, institutional, and psychological obstacles (Drydyk, 2013; Hur, 2006). Collective empowerment concerns notions of mobilization, self-categorization, community building, and collective action aiming at social change beyond what individuals are able to achieve by themselves (Drury et al., 2005; Mohan & Stokke, 2000). Empowerment studies have traditionally been more concerned with individual empowerment than collective empowerment, but since the late 1990s the interest in collective empowerment has grown (Hur, 2006; Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995; Reininger et al., 2000). More recently, scholars have further opened up their analytical conceptualizations of and interest in empowerment and have begun to attribute empowerment to large

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collectives as well as non-human entities, including nature and technology (Kauffman & Martin, 2017; Sieber, 2006).

In studying empowerment, another distinction made is that between being 'empowered' and the 'empowering' processes, settings, actions and agency that may lead to empowerment (Hur, 2006; Maton, 2008) – a distinction between empowerment as an outcome and empowerment as a process (Drury et al., 2005; Drydyk, 2013; Mohan & Stokke, 2000; Moulaert et al., 2005; Reininger et al., 2000; Rogers & Singhal, 2003; Rowlands, 1997). There is a subtle difference between the two understandings: the former considers empowerment an end in itself (a virtue or norm), the latter considers empowerment a means to an end (Maru, 2009; Van der Heijden & Ten Heuvelhof, 2012). The former appears to have more resonance in studies on social welfare and social work, whereas the latter is more common in political science (Hur, 2006). Sherry Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation provides an appropriate example to illustrate this difference. As Arnstein suggests and others have empirically observed, sometimes, those in power involve citizens in decision-making processes, but only as a tokenistic gesture (Arnstein, 1969). They are not willing to truly share their power with them. Thus, citizens involved may de jure have been given more agency, de facto this will not help them improving the situation they are in. Those evaluating empowerment as an outcome would consider this a flawed or even failed form of empowerment (Arnstein, 1969; Oakley, 2001; Wilkinson, 1998). Those evaluating empowerment as a process may be milder in their judgement. That is, while the tokenistic form of participation is not helping citizens directly to improve the situation they find themselves in, it may show them how limited their power is and possibly unite them around that issue, which ultimately may raise resistance and calls for change. While tokenistic, this increased agency could then be considered a relevant empowering setting (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; Hur, 2006).

A third and final for this book relevant distinction is that between what we, again for simplicity, conceptualize as legal empowerment and extra-legem empowerment (Drury et al., 2005; Drydyk, 2013; Golub, 2010; Hur, 2006; Ibrahim & Alkire, 2007; Mohan & Stokke, 2000; Moulaert et al., 2005; Reininger et al., 2000; Rogers & Singhal, 2003; Rowlands, 1997; UNDP, 2009). Legal empowerment is generally conceptualized as a process in which governments or other authorities provide legal or regulatory frameworks to empower particular disadvantaged groups and individuals; and, as a process in which individuals and groups use legal or regulatory frameworks to empower themselves (Bruce, 2007; Commission on Legal Empowerment of the Poor, 2008; Maru, 2009, 2011). These forms of empowerment are, in a sense, about the legitimacy of actors and the legitimacy of the agency given to them (Black, 2008; Haines, Reichman, & Scott, 2008). Extra-legem forms of empowerment are those in which individuals or collectives seek increased

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agency to govern and transform urban futures outside existing legal or regulatory frameworks. A well-known example is the various transnational municipal networks (TMNs) that have emerged since the 1990s. While they have little decision-making power at national or international levels, they have spurred and accelerated climate action at local level (Koon-hong Chan, 2016; Ljungkvist, 2016; Van der Heijden, 2018). Of course, the downside of extra-legem forms of empowerment is that approaches to govern and transform urban futures may be illegitimate or undemocratic, or result in illegitimate or undemocratic outcomes (Dawson, 2017; Hayden, 2014). For example, the 'climate proofing' of New York City with additional parks and green space was largely a result of wealthy residents organizing around this issue. Their neighbourhoods now indeed have increased green space, which has driven up property values. This drives out poorer residents from these neighbourhoods, only furthering social inequalities in the city (Gould & Lewis, 2016).

What follows from this discussion is that by no means can it be assumed that the increased agency discussed earlier leads to increasing capacity for transformative urban climate governance. Increased agency *in* urban climate governance is not synonymous with increased empowerment *of* urban climate governance. Increased agency may be tokenistic or distract from achieving a desired outcome, and inappropriate levels of agency may even be disempowering (Drury et al., 2005; Sieber, 2006). Finally, even when increased agency leads to increased empowerment of climate action, the outcomes of these actions may not be desirable. This book is therefore interested in which actors are becoming empowered to govern climate change, legitimately or otherwise, and what forms of agency are developed that enable and increase the capacity to address climate change.

When the Themes Meet: Puzzles for Policy, Practice, and Academia

These three themes – the politics of urban climate futures, increased and diversifying agency, and contested empowerment – raise important questions for urban climate policy, practice, and academia. For instance, what novel agents have emerged in urban climate governance since the early 1990s, and in what ways do they act? How is power given to or taken by them, and how do they exercise it? Who gains and who loses from the growing number of agents in urban climate governance? For example, the ever-growing number of agents in urban climate policy may have positive and negative impacts. An obvious positive impact is that the use of local agents to solve local urban climate problems may result in more adequate, tailored urban climate responses than traditional one size fits all urban climate policy solutions developed by somewhat distant agents. A possible negative impact may be that because of the high number of agents involved in urban

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