Local Climate Governance

Developments and Setting of Interaction

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Abstract

In the field of climate policy, it is crucial to involve all actors within an urban society to achieve climate protection goals. This requires a change in behavior from citizens, consumers, and producers. Therefore, we believe that dialogue and cooperation are essential for successful local climate governance. Our research project aims to investigate the development of new forms of action, measures, and regulations in climate policy, specifically those that fall under the term "interactive governance."

Our project focuses on seven major cities in Baden-Württemberg, Germany. We conducted interviews with individuals from public administration and civil society, totaling 16 guideline-based interviews. Additionally, we conducted internet research to gain preliminary insights into local developments.

The results indicate that there have been developments within the local political and administrative systems, primarily driven by municipal climate protection plans, the recognition of climate protection as a cross-cutting issue and the influence of national and federal politicson local administrative action. Additionally, there is a notable amount of initiatives and engagement within urban society, led by the local civil society, municipal businesses and private economy.

Our study identified four major forms of interaction and cooperation in this context:

* Public participation as citizen participation
* The involvement of stakeholders
* Getting an impact on public opinions
* Co-production for the implementation of measures

These forms of cooperation are not mutually exclusive; they collectively shape the characteristics of interactive governance at the local level. This research highlights the significance of these cooperative efforts in achieving climate policy goals and promoting sustainable development within urban areas.

1. Introduction

The "Local Climate Governance" pilot project has investigated the question of which forms of planning and administration have developed in the area of local climate policy during recent years – hereby utilising the example of seven larger towns in Baden-Württemberg. Two initial considerations were decisive in this case.

On the one hand, towns, cities and municipalities play a key role when it comes down to the specific implementation of a turnaround in climate policy - in areas such as energy, transport, housing and urban development. On the other hand, the social and political thrust of a broad social/cultural/political environmental movement has become effective, especially now at the local level and in the politics and administration which are institutionalised there.

Models for life and economics, decisions regarding investment and consumption largely determine the extent to which climate change can succeed. Successful policy is subsequently not just the only one or even first and foremost a question of regulatory provisions, rather also a question about involving citizens, companies and businesses - not only those participants who are already leading the way, but also others with whom it is essential to enter into a dialogue with so that they also finally join in. What is possible locally in terms of policies for the environment and climate is not just decided by elections, but also in the day-to-day life of relationships between politics, administration and urban society.

This therefore led to the central question of our pilot project: To what extent are new forms of action, measures and regulations - altered forms of "governance" - developing in towns, in cities and municipalities? How can a new mindset and corresponding demands from society also find their way into politics and administration? And how can a municipal policy which accepts the challenges created by the policy for the environment and climate also find good ways to cooperate with a diverse urban society - not only with those who demand more decisive action, but also those who react sceptically or indifferently or wonder how their interests are to find a place in it.

There are several descriptions of reformist and innovative approaches in municipal climate policy (e.g.: DIFU 2018; Friedrich Ebert Stiftung 2020) and, for some years now, concepts for their better understanding have been discussed internationally under the titles "interactive" / "collaborative" / "intersectoral" governance. Based on this, we wanted to know: what is developing here at the local level? To what extent is the assumption of new tasks in climate policy and environmental policy also linked to the search for new forms of administrative policy and therefore its interaction with local civilian communities? We therefore analysed network-accessible documents in seven towns and conducted interviews with representatives from politics and administration and from organisations/associations/initiatives from the urban society. The report thereby concentrates on recording developments in flux. Throughout, the tension between new and innovative approaches in local climate governance and the outdated rules and institutional architectures, with which politics and administration still operate become visible. What significance could new approaches to a more interactive local climate governance get?

1. Interactive Governance - Cornerstones of an Analytical Concept
	1. Interactivity: The common fundamental idea of various concepts for a “new governance”

When one speaks of governance instead of government, the emphasis is normally placed on the processes of governing in which - in whatever form - actors from the social sphere participate in more forms than traditionally.

The observation and analysis of such alterations in governance, especially but not only in democratic systems, takes place in the theoretical literature which is available under varying headings. The mention of "new governance" as "modern governance" (Kooiman 1993) referred quite generally to altered relationships between state governance and the addressees in society. A central concept was that of cross-sectoral "policy networks" (Marin/Mayntz, 1991). In the subsequent international discussion, three terms in particular have become established: that of "collaborative" governance (Ansell/Gash 2007; Hofstadt et al. 2022), "intersectoral" governance (McQueen et al. 2012; in Germany https://www.isog.dhbw.de/) and "interactive" governance (Torfing/Peters/Pierre/Sörensen 2012/2019). Despite all the differences in detail, there remains a great affinity between these concepts. The common fundamental idea can be formulated as follows: They understand governance as a question of development and dealing with different forms of mutual influence and coordination between participants from the state sector, civil society and the economy – their involvement in the preparation of concepts, in decision-making and in the process of their implementation.

When the term "interactive governance" is preferred in the following, then this is not in the sense of adopting all the specifics of this concept, rather more because this term expresses particularly well the "interplay" (interaction) for the different participants in a setting there is not just one centre of activity.

* 1. Interactive governance in a democracy

The idea of interactive governance is closely linked to questions of appreciating, using and revitalising the opportunities which can be provided by a democratic order. The question is how new and traditional forms of politics and governance can combine, to what extent the new displaces or influences the old and, whether on balance, such combinations of traditional and new elements enable more democracy, possibilities for dealing with the future and securing citizens' rights.

Democracy with its conventional procedures in politics and administration initially means that not all areas of society are subjected to state "control", rather more they are regarded as the civil society, market economy and private sphere of life, thereby representing spheres with their own rights and freedoms. In the case of democratic regimes, state governance with its possibilities of intervention is therefore limited in numerous ways: by the constitutionally guaranteed rights in the various spheres and by the fact that the power of government is always linked back to elections and the formation of opinion in its own, public sphere. What is now demanded in the concepts for intersectoral/interactive/collaborative governance is the upgrading of elements which are mostly given lesser importance in the "classical" forms of liberal representative democracy. They can be briefly summarised in four points:

* The *additional stronger involvement of* participants and interests which are *particularly affected* atthe respective place and in the respective area of a political intervention. The term *stakeholder* isvery often utilised for this.
* Opportunities for citizens as *co-producers* for personal services (health, education, culture) (Brandsen/ Steen/ Verschure 2018) to be able to participate in their design and functioning, individually and through their own organisations.
* The joint search for situation-specific variants and concepts, which could thereby deviate from sameness in the sense of centrally decreed uniformity without, however, calling into question equal basic rights. There is a close relationship here with concepts of "*multi-level governance*", which not only functions hierarchically, but also as a reference framework for *interactions between local innovations and central impulses* (e.g. through model programmes) (Evers/Ewert 2021).
* This therefore requires reorientation and restructuring on *all sides*. Political organisations and bodies (local councils, elected officials) and administrations now need to *open up statehood further to* stakeholders from civil society and business. But they, too, must adjust to the corresponding challenge of collaboration and conflict management; they cannot just simply regard themselves as a "counter-power" which thereby limits itself to organising "pressure" from below or from outside; within the framework of democracy and interactive governance, they, too, are *co-responsible participants.*

For the time being, these new approaches which have been outlined in the four points often grow alongside traditional forms of governance, "in the shadow of hierarchy" (Mayntz 2010). But increasingly, questions also arise about their connection and blending with traditional forms of democratic governance.



Figure 1: Interactive governance in a democracy

* 1. Interactive governance - not a guarantee but an opportunity for strengthening democratic politics and administration

Interactivity within the meaning of strengthening and expanding mutual coordination processes, also as sector overarching, is sometimes traded as the silver bullet for more democracy and more effective administration. However, it must not be overlooked that the value and effects of single measures must always be viewed in relation to the overall institutional ensemble of democratic politics and administration. The forms of interactive governance are fundamentally not intended to override governing/decision-making as it is known from a liberal representative democracy, rather more to be able to develop it further. However, more influence - e.g. via civil society organisations - is hardly just a mere add on. And it does not also have to be a win-win game. The controversial discussion about strengthening elements of "direct" democracy is well known. A stronger role of stakeholders or citizens' councils involved in political processes might, for example, sometimes weaken the influence of elected parties and selected experts on local opinion-forming. But does this only actually mean a weakening or not also a gain in democracy? Torfing et al. (2019, 186 f.) have outlined the possible gains, although the risks of new elements of interactive governance:

* Procedures which have to rely on additional special opportunities for participation by the more affected partners (stakeholder participation) can be more problem-oriented than those which rely solely on general legitimacy (by involving "the majority of citizens in the country"). This can also speak out for more communal and local freedom of action. However, special local decision-making rights or negotiations in settings which are located close to the problem can also serve coalitions of inertial forces and partial interests ("not in our backyard").
* Forums of intersectoral cooperation at local and regional levels and, in relation to specific tasks (e.g.: environmental protection, health, education), can create additional complementary opportunities for exchange which will thereby strengthen the overall voice of citizens in political processes; but such forms of de-centralisation can also mean that the opportunities for creating majorities in the wider public and uniform solutions that are binding for all are thereby made even more difficult.
* Approaches which involve "private life" more strongly in politics, where citizens with their lifestyles are also addressed as consumers and co-producers of more or less environmentally sound living conditions (mobility, energy consumption, nutrition, neighbourhood policies), can expand the sphere of action of institutionalised politics. However, such a politicisation of what was formerly private can also mean that questions of effective structural reforms are shifted to a multitude of "micro-policies" and ecological transition is treated solely as the sum and result of many small amendments and not also as the result of political settings. Where one addresses social transition solely as a question of personal life choices, it is trivialised.
	1. Interactive governance in local climate policy - limits and emphases for our stock taking process

We would like to highlight three points which are important in relation to the limitations created in our stock taking.

1. *Networks of local climate governance and the broad field of environment-related actions and initiatives in urban society.* Many groups, initiatives and organisations develop themselves independently of organised networks of participation and influence. Beyond the narrower thematic scope of initiatives which have been addressed by local climate governance, there is a much broader field of engagement involved here - for example regarding issues for sustainable food and public health, the protection of biodiversity or the maintenance of evolved structures of neighbourhoods. They are not aimed at active participation in governance decisions. Nevertheless, they still shape some of the socio-cultural fields in which local climate governance must seek some kind of base line.
2. *Discussing the policies of political administrations can grasp just a part of what is at stake in politics.* Issues relating to the climate and environment, with their high public importance and fundamental nature, can usually not only be viewed as a question of a specific field and the administrative body "responsible" for it. Mistrust of the administration as a direct partner can refer to generalised mistrust of "those people up there", to fundamental questions of respect and justice which go beyond concerns with the quality of a specific policy. Hence much of the governance-talk has difficulties to grasp basic and general motives on the side of the social counterparts who they want to address. These limits are also marking the overview presented by us.
3. *Different tasks of new forms of governance: Negotiation of interests and efforts in order to find common goals.* Practices and formats of participation are usually situated between two poles. One of these is the negotiation of compromises between different stakeholders, a "lowest common denominator" in which different prior attitudes and objectives ultimately remain untouched. Another pole is that of joint *opinion-forming* on an initially contentious issue. There are obvious differences between agreements along the lines of what is often called "bargaining" and what is called "deliberative democracy". But often, in the practice of many forms of *public participation,* both elements can come together.

Overall, our study is limited to noting different forms and forums of interactive governance in the field of municipal climate policy, their specificities and references. It does not represent an assessment of the entire process.

1. Methodology of the study and report

The focus of the study is placed on the local level. For this purpose, we selected seven large towns which are located in the Federal State of Baden-Württemberg where there were indications[[1]](#footnote-1) that an active local climate policy is particularly advanced. However, this selection can only be claimed to be representative when one can assume that, in such selected towns, signals are being given for a climate policy awakening which is only just beginning in other towns, both larger and smaller ones.

The findings presented in the following chapters are based on two survey methods - document analysis and interviews with experts. The document analysis primarily served to obtain an initial insight into the field and the towns. The aim was to find out who is active on the ground, which climate protection-relevant events have taken place, whether there is a municipal climate protection concept in place and which subjects are being dealt with by politics, administration and civil society groups. The document analysis also helped us to prepare the interviews and to ask specific questions about individual participants, events and measures. .

Qualitative expert interviews were utilised as an additional data collection method. Expert interviews assume that the person in question is interested in his or her capacity as an expert and representative of a group.(Flick 2014, P. 214) Our interviewees, climate protection officers, staff or employees in the climate offices or environmental offices, represent the local administration, and the interviewees from civil society also speak for their group or initiative. In the expert interviews, a stronger structuring than e.g. in biographical interviews is considered sensible, (Helfferich 2011, P. 164) and we have developed a guideline for this accordingly. It comprises questions regarding the handling and implementation of climate protection measures, questions relating to the role of different stakeholders, about intersectoral cooperation and resulting conflicts, and regarding alterations in local governance. In this way, a total of 16 interviews were conducted. Seven of them were with people from the public administration sector, another eight with representatives from civil society and one interview with a person from academia.

The data obtained in this way was analysed according to the coding and interpretation scheme which had been developed by K. Charmaz (2010) on the basis of classical grounded theory. The categories which we developed through initial and focused coding therefore guide the structure of the following presentation of results. We have decided not to present the results for each individual town, rather to work out similar trends which had become visible (with local variations) in the seven towns that had been studied. Special features for the individual towns are explicitly referred to at the appropriate point.

1. Participants in local networks

Initially, we want to provide an insight into the developments which can be observed in politics and public administration. The municipality is the linchpin of intersectoral governance at the local level. Many things are initiated and steered by its institutions. It should be emphasised, especially in the context of climate policy, administration and politics cannot be equated, as in many other contexts, even though both systems are closely intertwined.

New developments among organisations and participants in urban society therefore accompany, or even precede, these developments. Mergers in local alliances which attempt to gain more weight vis-à-vis the municipality and to formulate common goals and demands across different ideas and goals of the participants are good examples of this.

* 1. New developments within politics and administration

Crucial for an increasing professionalisation and institutionalisation of local climate management, as we have been able to observe through the interviews which we conducted, are not just the increased ambitions at EU and federal level to strongly reduce CO2 emissions through climate protection targets and through the Climate Protection Act of 2021. In the course of these debates, many towns have set themselves climate protection targets and participated in model projects such as "100 climate-neutral and smart towns" or certification such as the "European Energy Award". The ambitions of the towns which we have studied vary widely, from climate neutrality by 2030 to a 90% reduction by 2050. What they all have in common, however, is that *climate protection plans*have becomeincreasingly important in the municipalities, climate protection has established itself as a *cross-cutting issue*in the administration, and *politics*has a decisive influence on corresponding administrative action at the local level and also up to the federal level.

In the towns, detailed *climate protection plans*have been developed or revised during recent years or are still being developed. These have been either prepared by an external agency or by the town administration itself, in most cases with the participation of citizens. They are then adopted by the municipal or town council and thereby, after the preliminary work of the administration has been concluded, politically legitimised. In these plans, various goals with sub-goals are defined and measures are subsequently derived from them. What is significant about these plans is that the representatives for environmental and/or climate protection in the town administration are issued a strong political mandate in order to implement the measures, which can increase the assertiveness within the administration. At the same time, the urban community can refer to the adopted goals and measures and demand their implementation.

*"That means we can refer to it [...] or other groups can refer to it and say, dear town administration, however it says in the climate protection programme that you want to implement this and that. And that simply gives you a bit more pressure, because it is a measure which can be implemented by 2030. And then it is much easier for us to demand it."* [[2]](#footnote-2)

In the towns which we have studied, the climate protection managers are those responsible for the development of, and follow-up for, the implementation of the climate protection plans. They either have an independent staff position in which they are solely responsible for the subject of climate protection or they are embedded in environmental departments or similar bodies. The interviews showed that considerable resources have been built up in this area over the last few years i.e. new staff positions have been created and the budget for climate protection has been increased. Nevertheless, in the perception of the interviewees, the resources and especially the personnel, are not yet sufficient for this task. They repeatedly refer to a discrepancy between the higher ambitions of local climate policy and the extent to which financial and institutional resources have been strengthened.

One of the challenging aspects of the position of a climate protection manager is that climate protection is a *cross-cutting issue*within the administration. Without close collaboration with the building department and transport department, for example, a climate protection manager cannot implement their measures or can only do so inadequately, and potentials are therefore lost. Close and good cooperation is therefore crucial for this subject, *"but in the end it is difficult to really force through climate governance in all departments, so to speak"*[[3]](#footnote-3) The interviewees often wish to dismantle hierarchical structures in favour of more cooperative horizontal structures and to develop working methods which will assist to integrate such cross-cutting issues into the administration in a better way.

However, the administration not only has to find an internal way of dealing with climate protection as a cross-cutting issue, rather one which is also closely linked to local *politics***,** which thereby has a decisive influence on administrative action. Not least due to public pressure, climate protection is *"simply a topic which is very strongly politically driven by various parliamentary groups"*[[4]](#footnote-4) Nevertheless, there is sometimes a lack of political support and understanding for the challenges of implementing measures. And then it is *"a bit of a strategy, I would say, on the part of the [politicians] to simply say "OK, we'll decide on [ambitious climate protection targets] now and then we'll have reduced the current pressure for the time being". […] I would say that if we then implement this in really operationalised objectives and it is clear what this means, then the backing that the administration has received from the politicians to actually implement these objectives is actually no longer provided.”*[[5]](#footnote-5)

From the administrative side, however, hopes are also placed in politics at federal level and state level. These can be important sources of mandates and impulses for local climate policy and could facilitate implementation on the ground by utilising legal requirements.

*"[...] that climate protection can happen, but that whether it will happen also depends very much on what course is now going to be set at the federal level. Even the most ambitious town will not manage to become climate neutral by 2030 when the Federal Government does not set the right course. That means not only funding programmes, but also real requirements, because we have noticed in recent years that we have to pay very high funding rates in order for something to happen, and that the pace will not be sufficient. So now we really need regulations from above.”*[[6]](#footnote-6)

As this quote shows, climate protection at the targeted speed requires not only a well-positioned administration but also close collaboration between all political levels, in the sense of multi-level governance.

* 1. Developments among providers and actors from urban society

Civil society groups and initiatives, but also representatives of the business community, play a central role in shaping climate protection measures. Furthermore, public enterprises are also important with their position which is located between institutionalised politics and administration, business and civil society.

Civil society

In the field of climate protection, a broadly diversified plural engagement can already be seen in an Internet search. Not all initiatives in the broader field of sustainability belong to the narrower thematic area of local climate governance. Nevertheless, they are still a part of the broad local network which helps to shape the local political climate and developments. Over the last few years, numerous new initiatives have been founded in this field. Genuine environmental protection organisations such as BUND and NABU also deal with climate protection and thereby broaden their profile.

Within this broad spectrum of engagement, one organised movement - Fridays for Future – particularly stands out. In all the municipalities which have been surveyed, Fridays for Future is engaged and present with local organisations and its own initiatives.

*"But in fact, in the last three or four years, there has certainly been a momentum in my opinion. The social movement in Fridays for Future was the clear trigger. With all the accompanying sub-groups which have since joined or been formed in parallel, however you want to describe it. And this was triggered by social pressure, which was then reflected in the municipal council through corresponding majorities."*[[7]](#footnote-7)

Fridays for Future has succeeded in building up sustained public pressure, which has provided climate protection with a much higher priority in politics and administration.

Overall, an amendment in the conditions for action by politics and administration results from a variety of paths:

* By influencing local public opinion
* By raising awareness of climate change issues with new educational institutes and learning facilities (such as in Freiburg with the so-called "Ökostation" as an environmental education centre https://www.oekostation.de/de/)
* Through direct participation in climate protection concepts, for example in committees and councils *"And exerting influence there is certainly an important part of the work and not only specifically the plans, rather in general the, I say it like it is in the end, lobbying for climate protection and nature protection must be an integral part of the work for us as associations."*[[8]](#footnote-8)
* By initiating referendums or residents' decisions (such as German Zero, which has set up its own team for climate decisions https://germanzero.de/was-wir-tun/klimaentscheide)
* By utilising practical involvement in the implementation of projects and measures, such as in energy cooperatives, where social, ecological and economic goals can come together *"They are super. super for such, for the expansion of renewable energies, because they support the idea and also profit from it themselves*" [[9]](#footnote-9)

The multitude of different initiatives illustrates "civil society" as a field that is polyvalent and in motion with its various activities and actions. However, it is also a much less fixed and clearly defined entity than other institutionalised actors in politics, administration and the economy.

Municipal companies

In addition to civil society, municipal companies, subsidiaries and affiliates are also important stakeholders. These usually include the municipal utilities, and in some cases also housing associations or transport companies. What is special about these companies is that they represent central fields of action for climate neutrality, where the participation or affiliation with the town can sometimes make it possible for the administration to exert more influence than in other private-sector areas.

*"And not all of them use it in such a way that they have their own municipal utilities like we do. Some have also delegated it to a large regional supplier. And some have sold off their municipal utilities and then are only left with partial ownership or no ownership at all. But nevertheless, even where it is not a municipal company, there are opportunities for access. And it is important to utilise this for energy planning, for the transformation to renewable energy. And the third level is transport planning, where the town possesses the original responsibilities. And this approach to the original responsibilities of the municipality, that's actually what I find decisive.*[[10]](#footnote-10)

These access possibilities, together with the measures for the climate protection plans and the commitment of the environmental bodies or climate offices, result in a particularly effective possibility of public influence. It varies in intensity in the towns and ranges from sporadic collaboration through to close cooperation on a large number of projects. In general, however, collaboration through climate protection plans and climate protection managers has gained in importance.

Some of the municipal utilities also commit themselves to the town's climate protection goals. They show initiative by promoting innovative climate protection projects and taking on a pioneering role in some areas.[[11]](#footnote-11) Various subsidies are of assistance here, whether from the municipality itself or through federal programme and state programme.

*"The problem in this instance, however, is that municipal utility companies, of course, consider themselves to be companies and want to make a profit. And if, let's say, the goals are so ambitious that they are no longer covered by funding programmes, or not sufficiently, and this goal of making a profit is therefore in danger, then they basically close down completely because they say, "OK, no, we are a company. We have to act entrepreneurially, so to speak. ".*[[12]](#footnote-12)

Similar to transport planning, questions relating to energy supply are often simultaneously a public issue, a regulatory task for politics and administration, as well as a field of activity for specialised public enterprises.

For this reason, the municipal utility companies, in collaboration with the administration, are attaching increasing importance to counselling, advisory and educational work regarding energy issues, whether through the municipal utility companies' own counselling centres or special campaigns.

Economy

Commercial enterprises naturally also play a major role in climate protection - both as problematic large producers of CO2 but also as partners whose technology and expertise are needed for energy transition projects. For both reasons, it is important for the administration to explore collaboration options with companies.

*"And I think that's exactly who we have to try to get on board capture and start collaborating with, and show what has actually been happening for a long time? Or to show them where we want to go with them in the long term? And can we perhaps cooperate more closely in the sense of showing the possibilities and pointing out what lighthouse projects, for example, actually already exist?”*[[13]](#footnote-13)

When asked about issues of business cooperation, the interviewees repeatedly mentioned two points in particular: creating effective offers for businesses and creating exchange forums through which dialogue can be facilitated and become more natural.

*"For example, the town has initiated a climate alliance with companies, where the town approaches companies and invites them to participate as cooperation partners under the label of "climate protection and CO2 reduction". As companies, they have the advantage of gaining a kind of image. They are also advised in the area of monitoring, for what they can do themselves in the area of climate protection and sustainability, to then also show themselves in this climate alliance".*[[14]](#footnote-14)

It is considered important by the administration to tailor the offers to the companies in the respective region. This means that offers should always be adapted to the level of development of the respective companies. Pioneering companies should be supported in their specific needs and, at the same time, presented as a beacon for other companies.

Among civil society participants, however, voices are being raised which criticise the fact that during negotiations in the tension area between environmental interests and corporate interests, the latter are always provided with too much space. This points to the general problem of the extent to which intersectoral cooperation for climate protection is a question of moderation or a question of regulation.

*"Where it's probably lacking in some areas is the fact that there is at least the impression among us in [civil society organisation] that large corporations, large business representations are still often permitted to do what they want based on how they feel."* [[15]](#footnote-15)

In the relationship between civil society organisations, which see themselves as advocates of climate change, and companies, however, it is not only about criticism and demarcation, rather also about initiatives which are required to create dialogue. Many companies feel how important environmental issues have become for public acceptance in the regional environment.

*"There are also companies in the region [...] where the contact [with civil society organisations] has led to the development of really sensible measures when expanding a company. [...] And if we approach companies from our side and are willing to talk about this to them, at least some of them are open to it. Especially since they simply realise that they need the acceptance of the population, they need the acceptance of the region.”*[[16]](#footnote-16)

* 1. Local alliances and alliances

Another development within urban society is that so-called climate alliances can be found in almost all of the towns which have been studied.

*"Exactly, there are the traditional environmental associations [...] which do their own public relations work and have their own projects. There are also Fridays for Future. This whole range of new climate protection movements, like Ende Gelände, Fridays for Future. [...] They all exist, I think, and I think they have been represented in this Climate Alliance, with 20 groups or initiatives.”*[[17]](#footnote-17)

As the quote illustrates, these alliances mainly consist of civil society initiatives, but also socio-economic stakeholders, various associations and - although rarely - companies also participate. The alliances are not in all cases firmly defined; membership is partly fluid. Who joins forces with whom depends on the respective subject, topic or action involved. Within the alliances, there are stronger and looser partnerships between individual participants.

There are various objectives associated with the formation of an alliance:

* In an alliance, it is possible to bundle the expertise of the participants who are involved. A framework is created in which information can be exchanged quickly and informally.
* An alliance is helpful in generating a voice and thereby increasing public pressure. If all the initiatives in an alliance can agree on a statement or a position, then this will always carry more weight with politicians and administrators. This can be seen in the negotiations about the climate protection plan: *"When the climate protection concept was being developed, they also joined together as a climate alliance.”*[[18]](#footnote-18)
* Through an alliance, it is also possible to start larger actions. "*And often there are also alliances, for example, when we call for a strike, we don't do it alone, but write to [the environmental associations] or things like [empowerment organisation] or so.”*[[19]](#footnote-19)

In this way, people from different initiatives can come together, there is more visibility and one can fall back on more resources and personnel support.

The climate alliances do not just network and act locally. There are also examples where climate alliances from different towns help each other out, especially in setting up and shaping the alliances. There is also a Europe-wide climate alliance with a strong German group [(](https://www.klimabuendnis.org/home.html)https://www.klimabuendnis.org/home.html).

1. Interaction and cooperation

After taking a closer look at the multitude of stakeholders, this chapter will subsequently focus on the forms of cooperation when viewed from the perspective of interactive governance - i.e. the disputes, connections and cooperation among each other, also across sectoral boundaries.

In the course of our work, four dominant forms of interaction have emerged, which we will discuss in more detail below:

* Public participation as citizen participation
* The involvement of stakeholders
* Getting an impact on public opinions
* Co-production for the implementation of measures
	1. Public participation as citizen participation

Our interviews have revealed a wide variety of forms of public participation. They can range from opinion-forming events such as citizens' assemblies to consultative formats like citizens' councils to proactive participation resembling citizens' petitions. These formats are generally considered to be positive and necessary by our interviewees. In some cases, the administration also has special representatives for forms of participation whose objective is to address the broad citizenship.

Negotiations are seldom held on strategic issues but mostly on practical issues, frequently with the aim of informing the citizens, listening to their proposals and any concerns they may have. Often, the discussion is limited to "concerns and suggestions", narrowing down to questions of detail. This is particularly noticeable in classic dialogue formats such as the *citizens' assembly.*

*"Because participatory procedures mean, for example, the classic citizens' dialogues. Classically, they only come at the end when everything has already been talked about, then you go out and create a report and say something about it. That means the citizens can no longer have any influence on it.”[[20]](#footnote-20)*

Participation procedures - in the zone between the discussion of fundamental alternatives and critical comments relating to the details of a plan which has already been decided on in its main features - can be viewed critically in many respects. The citizens' side would often like to be involved earlier, at a time when the entire procedure is still open. The administrative side repeatedly complains about the complexity of procedures in which often nothing more than a multitude of individual objections and reservations are collected.

In addition, *climate advisory councils*have been established in many locations. The participants are selected by the administration or politicians in order to act in a consultative capacity *"which is intended to support the local council as an advisory body regarding the subjects of sustainability and climate protection*"[[21]](#footnote-21) . The background for being selected by politics and administration are their practical and professional competences in matters of climate protection, for example through their involvement and participation in a civil society organisation or through professional activity in the scientific field. The establishment of such an advisory board is thereby associated with the hope, on the part of the town, that external expertise and new ideas can be obtained. Advisory boards require good organisational support and the willingness of those involved to invest an often considerable commitment, *"so somehow one has to find a way between, yes, between what is feasible, therefore also for the administration and, by the way, that is also work for them, to look after such advisory boards*" [[22]](#footnote-22)

*Citizens' councils*are clearly different from (climate) advisory councilswith a selection of participants from the point of view of (supporting) competence. Here, as the term "mini-publics", which is also often utilised, makes clear, the selection of participants is intended to represent the larger public in a small format, , and tooffer it a platform for the *joint formation of opinions and the associated learning processes.* The selection is madeby drawing lots, taking socio-demographic characteristics into account.

The Climate Citizens' Council of the Freiburg Region describes its work on its homepage as follows:

*"The participants subsequently work together in a moderated process in order to develop concrete recommendations on a predefined question point. In addition, they are comprehensively informed by experts. In the citizens' council, schoolchildren sit next to pensioners, immigrants to Germany next to people who have been rooted in the region for a long time. The professor talks with the farmer, the apprentice with the master tailor.”*[[23]](#footnote-23)

Both, these citizens' councils and the former mentioned (climate) advisory councils are about citizen participation: People get involved in the political process in a consultative way. However, while the advisory councils by their composition with selected experts and representatives of interest organisations are meant to provide additional legitimacy to the path selected by the town parliament or government, the citizen´s counsils are meant to present results of deliberations as an own independent product

Despite the differences between advisory councils and citizens' councils, the challenge still remains in both cases to determine the specific weight which is to be given to the opinion and advice of any public institution in a democracy where decision-making *power* should remain with elected bodies and their representatives

* 1. The involvement of stakeholders

When stakeholders are involved, it is not the general population which is thereby addressed, rather the certain participants who are deliberately selected to work with them on specific problems. *"Where really specific issues and solution options are worked on with representatives of the urban society."*[[24]](#footnote-24) Often, the focus is placed on the details and practical implementation of plans and measures. Cooperation is structured on the basis of subjects or special topics, such as the following examples in Figure 2 illustrate.



Figure 2: Areas of cooperation in stakeholder participation

Formalised exchange formats rarely exist and the degree of organisation varies greatly, starting from the daily collaboration on individual projects up to, and including, loose expressions of will.
*"So there was already positive feedback on the part of the companies, which were involved at that time, during the last preparation of the [climate protection plan], in the course of 'We want to work together and we want to help achieve the goal'."*[[25]](#footnote-25)

This type of participation has its limits when the stakeholders who are actually needed do not want to participate or when it is not possible to work out specific joint solutions down to the last detail. Our interviewees from the administration sector saw this kind of stakeholder participation as more resource-efficient than procedures of broad public participation: they often need less time and the results are more concrete.

* 1. Getting an impact on public opinions

In the discussion which have been held about climate policy, it is often overlooked that ultimately everyone has to be involved and not just certain stakeholder groups and committed citizens. Political parties and elected representatives are particularly aware of this. Influencing public opinion on a larger scale, winning and securing voter majorities is a central element *"And all the others-, all the others beyond that-, who are not in the classic ecological and climate bubble, I think that's the difficulty, to address them. To bring them along.*" [[26]](#footnote-26)

Appropriate public relations work should be effective and create acceptance, especially among those who are disinterested or already have prejudices about certain projects or technologies. First of all, it is about *"raising awareness for the area of climate protection and climate adaptation*"[[27]](#footnote-27) , but then it is also about making costs and efforts transparent with targeted advice. To this end, the administration launches campaigns, produces information brochures or organises events.

However, "public relations" is also an important instrument of civil society. It can also utilise the information to create a general awareness of the dangers of "business as usual" and to thereby explain the negative consequences of local projects and possible alternatives which their owners or operators leave unmentioned or sometimes try to play down. Here, too, the aim is to build up pressure which will ultimately count with the political parties and, probably, at the ballot box at a later date. Activists of Fridays for Future bear witness to this.

*"It's always about the public. It's always about developing public forces. That you make public statements where politics and administration can't get around it anymore, that one places that correctly."*[[28]](#footnote-28)

While the and means for getting an impact on public opinion will differ on the side of institutionalized politics and the organisations in the local civil society, the shared concern with winning majorities can also facilitate cooperation.

*"We [as the administration] actually need them [committed citizens] to do public relations work in a completely different sense, because they are our multipliers for certain areas which they can represent well themselves. Irrespective of whether this concerns solar energy, be it sustainable consumption. Everything has something to do with climate protection. It could be raising awareness for renewable energies.”*[[29]](#footnote-29)

In this context, the role of social media is becoming increasingly important. In some towns, for example, a citizens' app is now utilised to obtain up-to-date opinions on certain projects.

Public relations work gets a special quality where it propagates an easily comprehensible, mission statement for the town and the urban society the ultimately abstract goal of CO2 reduction an respective measures. Examples of such a policy of developing new mission statements are professionally organised urban campaigns such as "Tübingen macht blau" (Getting a blue sky for Tübingen) or "Grüne Stadt Karlsruhe" (Karlsruhe: a greening city).

* 1. Co-production for the implementation of measures

The cooperation forms of public participation and public relations work are primarily aimed at an interactive dialogue with the local citizens as a whole. Stakeholder participation, on the other hand, is about forms of cooperation and conflict management with a narrower circle of stakeholders and those who are affected. Closely related to this is what can be called *co-production.* This means a co-sponsorship of measures and projects - through corresponding consumption behaviour or one's own co-investments. The initiative can come from citizens or from politicians and administrators, and can take the form of advice and the provision of incentives, as in the case of PV systems and measures in order to save electricity, although it can be generated from a citizens' initiative whose joint project to green-up their neighbourhood is heard and supported.

The advisory offers and information services are diverse; they range from energy-saving brochures which can be handed out at the time of residence registration through to information events about the advantages and disadvantages of solar panels on one's own roof and up to, and including, cooperation with community initiatives at neighbourhood level.

*"So there is more counselling directly in the district, a kind of concept can be created. They look for potential for refurbishment, but they also provide personal advice. This includes events about certain subjects or topics, photovoltaic systems, heat pumps and so on, refurbishment, and even stalls set up at weekly markets, which are very popular at the moment. So this is somehow an offer which I think people are happy to take up, because there are hardly any appointments left in the official advisory meetings, because they are so much in demand. That's why there is now a format for standing at weekly markets, where you can ask your question: "Is the heat pump worth it for me or not, or what else can I do?”*[[30]](#footnote-30)

The aforementioned energy agencies play a special role in providing advice and information on subsidies. They not only aim to provide advice to individual households, but also to encourage and support community initiatives at neighbourhood level.

*"In my opinion, milestones to date have been the establishment of the energy agency, which was initiated and implemented almost 10 years ago, yes, 7, 8 years ago, as far as I remember. That's when the whole topic started to expand outwards. I think that is a big milestone. Breaking down the topic of climate protection and energy saving to such an extent that it can be grasped and can also be tangible in the wider population."*[[31]](#footnote-31)

The development of a culture of collaboration also means to include local businesses and companies. Here, too, the approaches are diverse. They range from one-to-one consultations, to continuous support in the implementation of individual projects, to company networks for peer exchange.

1. Conclusion

Our study has been aimed at recording the development of local climate governance in seven larger towns in Baden-Württemberg. The findings are therefore not representative for developments at the local level at large. But the examples from progressive cities can illustrate the opportunities and difficulties for a local policy on climate change and the environment.

It soon became very clear how much such developments are connected with the impulses of social movements in the environmental field, such as Fridays for Future in particular, with stronger climate policy impulses by state politics and federal politics, but also with local initiatives and movements and their influence on the local climate of opinion.

In the majority of our selected towns, an interactively operating local climate governance has become something which resembles a guiding parameter in local politics. It is reflected in a wide range of different, more or less institutionalised formats of exchange, consultation, negotiation, cooperation/collaboration. This includes the opening of politics and administration to urban society, but also the increase in active forms of co-design by citizens, addressed groups and initiatives. Public institutions such as municipal public companies and enterprises play a special role, both with regard to key areas such as energy and mobility, and due to their position between public welfare-related tasks and entrepreneurial orientation.

* In the broad field of interactive politics, three different modes of participation became distinguishable. The many forms of public participation and activation (ranging from "public relations" on the part of politics and administration to various "publicity" and politicising actions from civil society); they go along with the institutionalisation of diverse forms of citizen participation.
* Participation as stakeholder participation - as the voice of organisations and spokespersons from society and the economy who are particularly affected and important for the realisation of goals.
* Participation as a co-production - as co-sponsorship in the concretisation and practical implementation of individual projects and programmes.

The three elements are not strictly demarcated from each other, often intertwine and possess different weight as parts of interactive governance. One can say that in the first mode the public interest and common good are at the centre, in the second mode the concern with organized partial interests concerned and affected, and, in the third area, the practical questions relating to joint implementation.

A more interactive orientation of governance seems to be indispensable when it comes to adapt to today´s changing social conditions which can be ever less "steered" hierarchically. This does not mean, however, that such a modernisation step must be simultaneously more democratic and effective when it comes to manage climate change. The inclusion of a multitude of participants and an accompanying formalisation and legalisation of claims can also slow down, or even paralyse, processes of will formation and practical implementation (refer to Chapter 1.3). Examples of corresponding protracted debates, such as the following, can be found in almost all of the towns studied: *"Well [open space PV], that's a subject which we could discuss for an hour now, but what did I want to say now? [...] We also have a neighbourhood association. It is responsible for the land use plan. This means that we also have, for example, the two towns [...] for which we make the land use plan. [...]. And that means that we have both the regional council as the approval authority and also somewhere this district office as the lower nature conservation authority, the lower agricultural authority. Then we had an appointment with 15 representatives. I was in sheer despair, yes. If it hadn't been for the Ukraine crisis, I think we really wouldn't have been able to get through [...].*" [[32]](#footnote-32)

It cannot be ruled out that, in such processes, already dominant partial interests will retain their weight or even be strengthened.

There are no guarantees in terms of democracy and efficiency, but there is a relative advantage over traditional procedures. Interactive concepts are about recognising the legitimacy of a differentiated participation for everyone in the process and - when it comes to decisions of town parliaments and the actions of administrations - taking both, the respective groups with their concerns and needs, but also the opinion formation of the public, seriously.

With interactive governance, the decisive climate and environmental policy change desired by many can be strengthened but also retarded.

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1. E.g. reports and discussions in the media, but also the participation of these cities in national and European model programmes, awards and positions in corresponding ran-kings [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Interview 8, lines 166-171. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. 2nd interview, lines 80-82. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. 3rd interview, lines 360-361. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. 1st interview, lines 85-92. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. 4th interview, lines 482-488. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. 7th interview, lines 19-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Interview 12, lines 322-324 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Interview 10, lines 268-270. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. 2nd interview, lines 842-850. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Interview 11, lines 253-257. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. 1st interview, lines 151-158. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. 10th interview, lines 394-398. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. 11. interview. Z. 408-414. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. 12th interview, lines 38-41. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. 12th interview, lines 124-131. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Interview 11, lines 314-319. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Interview 11, lines 296-298. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Interview 8, lines 89-91. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Interview 10, lines 195-199. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Interview 13, lines 25-27. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. 9th interview, lines 398-400. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. [https://www.buergerrat.de/aktuelles/wir-haben-einfach- losgelegt/#:~:text=In%20the%20Region%20of%20Freiburg%20has,Initiators%2C%20how%20it%20all%20started%20](https://www.buergerrat.de/aktuelles/wir-haben-einfach-%20%20%20losgelegt/#:~:text=In%20the%20Region%20of%20Freiburg%20has,Initiators%2C%20how%20it%20all%20started%20) [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. 7th interview, lines 335-336. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Interview Z. 386-389. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Interview 10, lines 274-276. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Interview 10, lines 76-77. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Interview 6, lines 397-399. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. 10th interview, lines 256-259. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Interview 11, lines 447-456. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. 10th interview, lines 20-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Interview 14, lines 271-281. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)