

Call for Papers for a Special Issue on

Accountable Strategic Planning at Local and Regional Scales in the Age of Decarbonization

Topic and problem formulation

The global challenge of climate change can only be effectively addressed at the regional and local scale if a large number of regional and municipal systems in highly diverse contexts aim towards decarbonisation. Strategic planning – as a flexible planning tool for developing holistic and long-term development strategies in a cooperative and communicative way – is a popular form of shaping urban and regional futures in the age of decarbonisation (Matern/Förster/Knippschild 2022). Due to its flexibility strategic planning can be adapted to and accommodate highly diverse governance settings. Despite this large degree of adaptability, common denominators of strategic planning instruments at a more general level are that they offer orientation to the involved actors, link goals and strategies with measures and, through their cooperative creation processes, support reflection on existing development and enable collaborative learning processes (Balz/Zonneveld 2020). They often form exceptional planning situations, use stage effects and enable planning for functional spaces that can overcome administrative boundaries. However, due to their characteristics, they also come with a range of difficulties with regard to their accountable development and implementation (Matern/Förster/Knippschild 2022).

The concept of accountability is often discussed in relation to the exercise of state authority and the related principal-agent paradigm. It then refers to the relationship between the principal (the people) and state agents and establishes that state agents need to be accountable to the respective demos (people/electorate of a rule making spatial entity; see List/Koenig-Archibugi 2010) in the exercise of their delegated power (Stanbury 2003). In the context of polycentric climate governance accountability relations become more complex (Jordan/Huitema/Hildén et al. 2015; Bäckstrand/Zelli/Schleifer 2018). For example, whereas

a global demos indirectly legitimizes the global decarbonization agenda as enshrined in the 1.5 target of the Paris Agreement, a local demos is confronted with the implementation. State agents at the local scale, such as municipalities, have to be accountable towards both ends. On the one hand, they have a responsibility to work towards decarbonization in reaching a globally set goal; on the other hand, they need to be accountable towards the local principal and its conditions for the delegation and exercise of power in the specific local setting. Furthermore, there is a close relationship between (political) accountability and actual accounting, especially in the context of climate governance and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. On the one hand strict accounting regimes may enhance accountability of strategic decarbonization planning, on the other hand the “politics of data” may undermine or contribute to silencing local voices and interests that are not reflected in the metrics of greenhouse gas emission accounting (Gordon 2016; Hughes/Giest/Tozer 2020).

Although several political mandates such as Sustainable Development Goal 16, the New Urban Agenda as well as the city network of the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy call for accountable governance at all levels and the need to enhance accountability mechanisms in polycentric climate governance there is no definition or clear conceptualization of accountability in “glocal” environmental governance or decarbonization efforts as of yet (Cohen/Sabel 2005; Biermann/Gupta 2011; Bäckstrand/Zelli/Schleifer 2018). Strategic climate planning at local and regional scales could be a key factor in linking global and local decarbonization efforts and thus a suitable focal point to explore related accountability challenges (Zengerling 2018; Zengerling 2019).

Objectives and key questions

The Special Issue “Accountable Strategic Planning at Local and Regional Scales in the Age of Decarbonisation” focusses on strategic planning for decarbonisation at regional and local scales in a variety of international settings. It aims to contribute to conceptualizing, examining and critically reflecting upon accountability in local and regional strategic decarbonization planning (tools and processes), involved actors, context conditions and results. It seeks to explore accountability gaps as well as approaches and measures that reconcile flexibility and accountability in tackling a global challenge at regional and local scales.

Contributions to planning and governance research from different disciplinary perspectives are particularly welcome. The papers may be in English or German and relate to regional

strategic planning towards phasing out coal as well as local strategic climate action planning. The goal is to include international and national contributions that reflect a variety of approaches in accountable strategic decarbonization planning and related challenges in diverse governance settings encompassing the Global North and South.

Particular foci can be on:

- approaches that combine (innovative) strategic planning for decarbonisation with instruments that translate the mostly informally agreed upon strategies and measures into more binding targets, planning instruments and measures,
- selected elements of accountable planning such as responsibility, assessment, transparency and participation,
- the embedding of regional and local strategic climate planning in multi-level and polycentric climate governance, respective accountability chains and designs,
- individual and comparative case studies that explore which forms of accountable strategic decarbonization planning and related challenges take in different context conditions,
- reflecting upon conceptual framing of and the relationship between accountability, legitimacy and effectiveness,
- the role of (climate) justice in accountable strategic planning towards decarbonisation,
- the role of data, assessment, transparency and related standards in accountable strategic planning, including challenges related to the “politics of data”.

Quality assurance measures

Call for Abstracts: Using an open call for abstracts, interested authors are asked to send a draft abstract of 150 to 250 words to the guest editors to ensure a thematic fit with the Special Issue in advance. In addition, the guest editors will contact recognised experts in Germany and abroad directly.

Call for Papers: Authors of suitable abstracts will be invited to submit a manuscript.

Manuscripts can be written in German or English have to be submitted as a “Forschungsbeitrag / Research Article”. Submitted manuscripts (60,000 characters max.) have to be prepared according to the journal’s Instructions for Authors (<https://rur.oekom.de/index.php/rur/Authors>).

Double-blind peer review: As usual, all manuscripts will be subjected to an anonymous review process and will only be accepted on the basis of positive reviews.

Preliminary timetable

Call for abstracts	5 January 2024
Deadline for the submission of abstracts:	29 February 2024
Feedback to and selection of authors	31 March 2024
Deadline for the submission of complete manuscripts:	31 July 2024
The initial online publication (online first) will take place approximately four weeks after the respective contribution has been accepted	
The print publication of the special issue is scheduled for summer 2025	

For subject-related queries, please contact the guest editors: Jun.-Prof. Dr. Cathrin Zengerling (cathrin.zengerling@enlaw.uni-freiburg.de) and Prof. Dr Antje Matern (antje.matern@fh-erfurt.de). For organisational queries, please contact the Editor-in-Chief Prof. Dr. Andreas Klee (Andreas.klee@arl-net.de).

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