



**Invitation  
to the 4<sup>th</sup> IRS INTERNATIONAL LECTURE  
on Society and Space**

## **The Urban Politics of Climate Change: Energy Systems and the Art of Experimentation**

**Harriet Bulkeley**

### **Abstract**

The confluence of global climate change, growing levels of energy consumption and rapid urbanization has led the international policy community to regard urban responses to climate change as ‘an urgent agenda’ (World Bank 2010). The contribution of cities to rising levels of greenhouse gas emissions coupled with concerns about the vulnerability of urban places and communities to the impacts of climate change have led to a relatively recent and rapidly proliferating interest amongst both academic and policy communities in how cities might be able to respond to mitigation and adaptation. Theorizing urban climate governance as a set of processes that exceed the institutional boundaries of the local state, we argue that critical to the urban response to climate change is a mode of ‘experimentation’ where municipalities, private and civil society actors seek to demonstrate, experience, learn and challenge a multiplicity of interventions, projects and schemes as ‘solutions’ to the urban climate problem. Framed as ‘solutions’ (best practices, pilots, learning opportunities), climate change experiments provide a means for understanding the ways in which climate change is being problematized in the city, how actors, interests and various urban flows and materialities are being assembled in response, and the ways in which such interventions come to take on meaning within urban socio-technical systems and the spaces of the everyday.

Rather than regarding ‘experiments’ as exceptional, my argument is that they are central to the contested urban politics of socio-technical transition taking place in response to climate change. The lecture will explore these issues through the development of a new analytical approach for understanding the urban politics of climate change. It will draw on cases of how global cities are seeking to address climate change through experimentation with energy systems and relate this work to the wider politics of low carbon transitions.

The lecture will be based on a new book which is forthcoming with Routledge in Autumn 2014 written by Harriet with her colleagues Vanesa Cástan Broto (UCL) and Gareth Edwards (UEA).



Leibniz Institute for  
Regional Development  
and Structural Planning

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## **The Urban Politics of Climate Change: Energy Systems and the Art of Experimentation**

**Harriet Bulkeley**

### **Vita**

Harriet Bulkeley is a Professor in the Department of Geography, Durham University. Her research is concerned with the processes and politics of environmental governance, and she has particular expertise in the areas of climate change, energy and urban sustainability. She has published over 60 books and articles, including “Cities and Climate Change” (Routledge 2013), “Governing Climate Change” (Routledge 2010), “Cities and Low Carbon Transitions” (Routledge, 2011), and “Transnational Climate Change Governance” (CUP, 2014). In 2007, Harriet was awarded two prestigious national research fellowships – one of six ESRC Climate Change Leadership Fellowship and a Philip Leverhulme Prize – and she conducted two independent research projects concurrently under these awards from 2008–2012.

She currently leads the largest social science study of energy use in the UK through the Ofgen funded Customer Led Network Revolution project on smart electricity grids and is CI for an ESRC project on role of China and Brazil in low carbon transitions in Southern Africa. Harriet has served in an advisory capacity for DECC, Defra, Friends of the Earth, UN-Habitat and the World Bank. In 2013, she was appointed as the seventeenth holder of the King Carl XVI Gustaf’s Professorship in Environmental Science for 2014 and a Visiting Professor at Lund University.

We kindly ask all participants to register [here](#). Thank you very much.



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