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Trans-Local Climate Politics in Ordinary Cities: From Local Agenda 21 to Transition Towns to Climate Emergency Declarations

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Abstract

This article addresses the question of how ordinary cities, conceptualized here in a simplified way as peripheralized small and medium-sized cities, navigate (the complexities of) climate policy and planning. To do so, we elaborate on three temporal waves of trans-municipal environmental politics that have simultaneously shaped municipal climate politics in many places globally: (a) the Local Agenda 21, between 1992–2002; (b) the Transition Towns movement, between 2006 and 2015; and (c) recent climate emergency declarations, in place since 2016. Interestingly, the thousands of participating municipalities include not only the well-known frontrunners but also many small and medium-sized cities. Some have come into contact with climate and transformation issues for the first time, others have even been pioneers for much larger cities. However, the three waves also each have different characteristics in terms of underlying governance models, theory of change and scope of transition, role of planning and civil society, or output orientation. Through the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, an overview of interlinkages between the three climate policy waves in German ordinary cities is compiled from publicly accessible databases. In addition, qualitative impressions allow for statements on the actors of this transformation processes, including municipal governments and councils, civil society organizations and social movements, various bridging agents, and trans-national municipal networks. This perspective on (referential and institutional) continuities is deepened in a case study on the medium-sized town of Marburg, Hesse. As participating cities in all three waves are predominantly located in the Global North, the article aims to also contribute to the application of the "ordinary city model" to regionally peripheralized cities in globally non-peripheral regions.

Keywords

climate emergency declarations; Germany; Local Agenda 21; municipal climate politics; ordinary cities; Transition Towns; urban policy mobility

1. Introduction

How can ordinary cities act in times of climate emergency? After activist intellectuals Spratt and Sutton (2008) published their book *Climate Code Red: The Case for Emergency Action*, in which they outline a strategy to move institutional responses to climate change beyond business-as-usual approaches, a rather small network of Australian activists coined the term "climate emergency" for mobilization, especially in small and medium-sized cities (SMCs; see CEDAMIA, 2024; Ruiz-Campillo et al., 2021). However, according to Chou (2021), the strategy of using municipal declarations to influence other municipalities ("sideways") or to call on higher levels to take action ("upwards") did not seem particularly successful at first. The declaration as a political tool needed a fertile environment to spread. Especially from mid-2018 on, scientific publications, popular interest, natural disasters, and last but not least, major global strikes and demonstrations pushed for climate emergency declarations (CEDs) worldwide. By April 2020, more than 1,000 actors had already joined under this banner (including nation-states, universities, and companies; see Ruiz-Campillo et al., 2021). By mid-2023, this figure stood at more than 2,200 authorities (Brokow-Loga & Krüger, 2023). With the first declaration in 2017, the ordinary city of Darebin, Australia, with its 150,000 inhabitants took the lead in this massive wave of CEDs around the globe. Two questions follow from this observation: What is the role of SMCs in driving forward a progressive climate policy agenda? And is this a new phenomenon?

The second question can be answered quickly: No, the phenomenon of small and insignificant municipalities that are active in climate policy is just as old as municipal sustainability and climate policy itself. Therefore, this article looks back and places CEDs in a historical context of precedent waves of local climate policy, in which there is an amplitude in ecologically motivated initiatives, decisions, and approaches to implementation in various towns and cities worldwide. Thus, in contrast to Castán Broto and Westman (2020), who define two different "waves" of climate- and city-related academic publications—urban optimism and urban pragmatism—this article defines waves based on trans-local circulation of these climate policies. We identify the three waves as follows: the Local Agenda 21 (LA21) with policies in the late 1990s and early 2000s; the Transition Town (TT) movement, with policies in the early 2010s; and climate emergency policies (based on CEDs) in the late 2010s. All contributed to a special momentum with local governments increasingly interested in climate and sustainability goals in their urban development, as well as in influencing other governmental and non-governmental actors both "sideways" and "upwards."

Rooted in the concepts of resilience and degrowth, TT is the most radical concept and seeks "the reinvigoration of communities so that they become more self-reliant, lower energy infrastructures and tools for rebuilding ecosystems and communities eroded by centuries of delocalized, expert-driven economic and political systems" (Escobar, 2015). The first TT took place in 2006 in Totnes, England, with a population of less than 8,000 at the time (Smith, 2011). The movement had a background in academia (Hopkins, 2011), but resulted in approximately 1,100 initiatives and citizens' groups in towns and cities worldwide (Feola, 2016, p. 2). In contrast, the idea of LA21 was a call to action at the local level by the nation-states following suggestions from city representatives at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro (Coenen, 2009). LA21-inspired policies are rooted in the Summit's approach to sustainability to bridge environmental issues with the need for further development, especially in the Global South, but include aspects of localism and good governance (Freeman, 1996; Young, 1997). No individual city is known to have been the first to follow this path. The first phase of resolutions to draw up agendas began around 1995. In Germany, in addition to the major cities of Munich and Münster and the Berlin district of Köpenick, several SMCs are also part of the

first generation, such as Viernheim (Hesse; 33,000 inhabitants) and Landau (Rhineland-Palatinate; 47,000 inhabitants), the latter of which is also investigated in this article.

The primary aim of the article is to analyze the climate policy development paths of ordinary cities between the LA21 in the 1990s and the climate emergency at the end of the 2010s to shed light on often overlooked trans-temporal and local aspects of municipal climate policymaking. It is for this reason that the question of the specific roles of SMCs or ordinary cities in these climate policy waves, on the other hand, characterizes the argumentation of the article as a whole. In tracing the lines of innovative trans-municipal policy initiatives in the last three decades, we examine whether local path dependencies such as institutionalizations within the municipalities are an important context for present and future climate policy ambitions besides the global aspects mentioned above. Using Marburg as a case study, we specifically pursue the following research question: How are the municipal activities within the frameworks of the three climate policy waves—LA21, TTs, and CEDs—in German ordinary cities interlinked, and how do referential continuities affect the local actor constellation?

Although there are many individual case studies in the research field of urban climate policy, as well as summary evaluations of successes and failures, there is a notable lack of longitudinal studies. Whether EU Cities Mission or Resilient Cities, the focus is often on innovation and the prospect of finally acting now—yet scientific and political players run the risk of ignoring previous developments, barriers, experiences, and path dependencies. The importance of the historical developments of the 1970s and 1980s for contemporary urban climate policy is prominently mentioned by Angelo and Wachsmuth (2020, p. 2212), among others, who point out this shortcoming. Furthermore, in their article entitled "Cities and Climate Change: The Precedents and Why They Matter," Hebbert and Jankovic (2013) also emphasize that the close link between urban policy and planning and the consequences of anthropogenic global warming was anything but "unprecedented," as UN-HABITAT (2011, p. 1) has put it. However, while the authors search for traces well into the 1930s, in this article we limit ourselves to the period from the early 1990s to the present day.

We aim to close this gap by identifying seven similar cases through participation in all three waves and then using the city of Marburg, which is paradigmatic in several ways, to produce a more in-depth longitudinal case study that illustrates the conditions of emergence and (dis-)continuities of local climate policy. Above all, we are contributing to the debate with a historically informed view that at the same time consistently looks beyond the local horizon. The article presents original research using an explorative and innovative mixed-method design. To find appropriate cases, three different data sets were combined and internet searches conducted. This results in a rather broad comparison between seven cases primarily based on a qualitative analysis of policy and planning documents. The Marburg case study integrates findings from interviews that are part of an ongoing dissertation project by Anton Brokow-Loga.

Following this introductory section, we highlight a number of theories that are necessary to embed the empirical findings in the state of the art by adapting a systematic literature review. Section 3 makes our approach transparent, but also indicates its limitations. The case study research is twofold: First, we identify the (only) seven cases of those ordinary cities known to have participated in all three previously-mentioned waves to compare their ordinariness and specific climate governance as well as its trans-local and trans-temporal aspects. Second, we use a more in-depth case study of the city of Marburg to show these

aspects in greater detail. Finally, the concluding section classifies the study and identifies further practical and research potentials.

2. State of the Art

As this article covers an emerging debate that is situated in the wide and established field of research on cities and climate change at the intersection of urban planning, geography, and political science, the particular focus is on closing identified research gaps and problems. To operationalize the research question, ordinary cities and the various climate policy waves should be clearly outlined and defined. The central topics extracted from existing research and made manageable for empirical research include an examination of the *ordinariness* of climate politics and governance (2.1) and the characteristics of the temporal *waves* of trans-local climate politics (2.2). At the end of each section, we briefly present how this state of research informs the analysis grid: As an operationalization tool, this grid summarizes all the relevant theoretical categories relevant to the empirical research and can be found later in Table 3 as a general version that already encompasses parts of the research results.

2.1. Ordinary Cities and Climate Governance

As municipalities are often seen as strategic fields for climate change governance, as pioneers and networking agents, this article aims to investigate the research conducted around German ordinary cities in these contexts. Being officially recognized as sub-national actors in tackling climate change in the Paris Agreement of 2015, the role of cities and other municipalities has been subject to a widespread research landscape, but focus is mainly on larger cities (Bulkeley, 2010; Castán Broto, 2020; Kern & Bulkeley, 2009; van der Heijden et al., 2019b). Emphasis relevant to our research was placed on the diversity of agents at play (Castán Broto et al., 2020), the diversity of new governance arrangements (Haupt & Coppola, 2019), and the extensive engagement beyond national boundaries through trans-municipal networks (TMNs; see Lee, 2015). Among other aspects, this needs to be examined and embedded by discussing novel forms of agency within (trans-)local climate governance (van der Heijden et al., 2019a) as well as (trans-)temporal aspects of global sustainability thinking and policy (Angelo & Wachsmuth, 2020).

Ordinary cities have in general received little attention in research on local climate action thus far. Robinson (2002) refers to ordinary cities as cities "off the map"—in the context of municipal climate protection strategies. Given the importance of socio-ecological transformations in all municipalities, researching the (limited) strategies in "ordinary" places such as SMCs, especially if they are non-Anglophone, is probably much more relevant for a wider range of urban areas, especially when it comes to transferability questions. Although Robinson's (2013) analysis focuses primarily on peripheral cities in the Global South, we will continue to concentrate on the Global North, as a large proportion of greenhouse gas concentrations are caused by urban areas in the North leading to a higher transformation pressure (Hickel, 2021; Schmelzer et al., 2022).

If the response to human-induced climate change is the socio-ecological transformation of urban living spaces, it is unclear why research has thus far focused primarily on large metropolitan regions and pioneering cities. SMCs are significantly more numerous than these cities and therefore require greater attention in science and research transfer. SMCs are a gaping void in research on municipal climate policy and planning, and there are hardly any statements on urban policy mobility and participation in climate

policy TMNs (except Climate Alliance), with one exception being Haupt et al. (2021), who ask how German "ordinary" cities became climate pioneers. The research by Domorenok et al. (2020) on the effects of TMNs such as Covenant of Mayors also sheds light on transformation processes in larger cities, although Busch et al.'s (2018) assessment also includes smaller cities with more than 50,000 inhabitants. Haupt et al. (2021, p. 86) select Göttingen (120,000 inhabitants) and Remscheid (110,000 inhabitants) as ordinary cities gone climate pioneers. Research shows that Ordinary Cities have no fixed minimum or maximum limits in terms of population, density, or function in the system of central places. Although we follow this pragmatic classification by Haupt et al. (2021) of ordinary cities based on the number of inhabitants, we limit it to fewer than 100,000 inhabitants. This selection is in line with the official German classification of cities (BBSR, 2023). Due to a lack of very small municipalities participating in the three waves, there was no need to define a fixed minimum.

Based on the state of research on ordinary cities, we consider the limitation concerning the number of inhabitants—which is, however, contextualized in the specific spatial planning system and their location in a federal state—into the analysis grid. It is also necessary to consider the degree of peripheralization, which is why the administrative and economic function should also be included (see also Table 1). It also became clear that integration into TMNs can be an important influencing factor, especially for ordinary cities, which is considered in the analysis.

2.2. "Think Globally, Act Locally": Again and Again? Trans-Localism Over Time

Within the scholarly debate on CEDs, trans-localism is seen as an emerging mode of governance. The wider perspective taken in this article demonstrates that this mode has already emerged in LA21—most evident in the motto "think globally, act locally." Therefore, we also have to look at the trans-temporal cycles of this governance mode and the policies promoted. Municipalities or other local jurisdictions are increasingly recognized as strategic sites to tackle climate change (Castán Broto & Westman, 2020). However, urban policy mobility and the cycles of trans-local climate policies reflect not only the recognition of cities as important agents (van der Heijden et al., 2019a) that focus on local mitigation. A specific localism becomes visible here that can be rather described as a *trans*-localism in a notable way. As municipalities see their actions in connection with local-level activities around the world, other cities' experiences are mutually referenced and other levels of governmental action are specifically addressed or appealed to, a global—or better: trans-local—project seems to become visible.

Against the backdrop of existing research, it seems reasonable to first focus on this trans-boundary exchange. Which modes of polycentral governance with a focus on municipal agency are established in the absence of hierarchical authority relation (Gordon & Johnson, 2017, p. 699; cf. Ostrom, 2012, p. 425)? How exactly can central coordination and local collaboration be balanced (Dyson & Harvey-Scholes, 2022)? In addition, the specific governance must also become part of the investigations, especially when it comes to multi-scalar arrangements of very different actors: Not only municipal administrations, but also social movement initiatives, universities, companies, or the state are involved in novel forms of agency (van der Heijden et al., 2019a) and specific governance constellations implementing LA21, TT, and CED policies.

Although all the different actors in all three waves consider their actions not as contention but as initiatives and innovations toward the common good, at first glance, the intertemporal connections do have a striking

similarity to "cycles of contention" in movement theory (McAdam et al., 2001). Between LA21, TTs, and CEDs—and many cities even lacking the TT wave—there have been phases of latency (Melucci, 1984), but it seems a plausible assumption that there have been learning processes, individual and organizational continuities, and other connections over time (Tarrow, 2011). These wave crests and troughs will be used as empirical framework for the examination of the trans-temporal aspects.

We translate the following aspects from the state of research on trans-local political action and cycles of social movements into the analysis grid: The activities within the individual waves are just as much a part of this as the need to differentiate between firm municipal integration in a TMN or individuals in an activist network (see Table 3). Last but not least, the diversity of planning policy actors becomes clear, for which the analysis grid must remain open and flexible.

3. Research Strategy

After the identification of research gaps, we opted to approach the object of research in an explorative manner and with iterative loops. The methodological research approach consists of the following elements: Combination of databases; analyses of relevant documents and homepages; and guided expert interviews. We put the various elements together in an iterative process and sometimes faced the challenge of very poor data availability, especially with regard to the historical processes surrounding LA21 and TT initiatives. The triangulation with a detailed qualitative case study in Marburg is therefore intended to better contextualize the trends that were only vaguely documented in the other cities. Following the proposed research question, the operationalization in this section, therefore, focuses on defining and narrowing participating ordinary cities in Germany, the methodical identification of municipal activities, and interlinkages or references.

For all three waves, there is a clear preponderance of cities in Western democracies, and for TTs and LA21, there is a focus on Western Europe, which is largely due to the particular form of governance and planning systems. The Federal Republic of Germany, in which all three waves were relatively strongly represented, can provide a reasonably standardized frame of reference for the local activities. Pragmatic research reasons, namely language and access to specialist circles, also led to the research being geographically limited to Germany.

Within this geographical frame, we identified 106 municipalities with a CED (CEDAMIA, 2024), 66 of which qualify as ordinary cities of fewer than 100,000 inhabitants. With this data set, we were able to trace back the lines of previous TT and LA21 activities, basically relying on data sets conducted by movement actors (Agenda 21 Treffpunkt, n.d.; Transition Netzwerk DACH, n.d.; also partly based on government agencies) that contain 45 TT initiatives in ordinary cities and 2,335 ordinary cities that committed to LA21. We found 47 ordinary cities with CED and LA21 activities, but only seven with additional TT activities. However, none of the CED cities has engaged in TT but not LA21, while there are another 24 cities engaged in TT and LA21 but did not declare climate emergency for different reasons (Figure 1).

As we are particularly interested in the cities that went through all three waves, at the end of the selection process, seven cities were selected for more detailed analysis. It is worth noting that all seven cities are located in the former West Germany, whereas municipalities in the former German Democratic Republic (former East Germany) are underrepresented in all three waves.

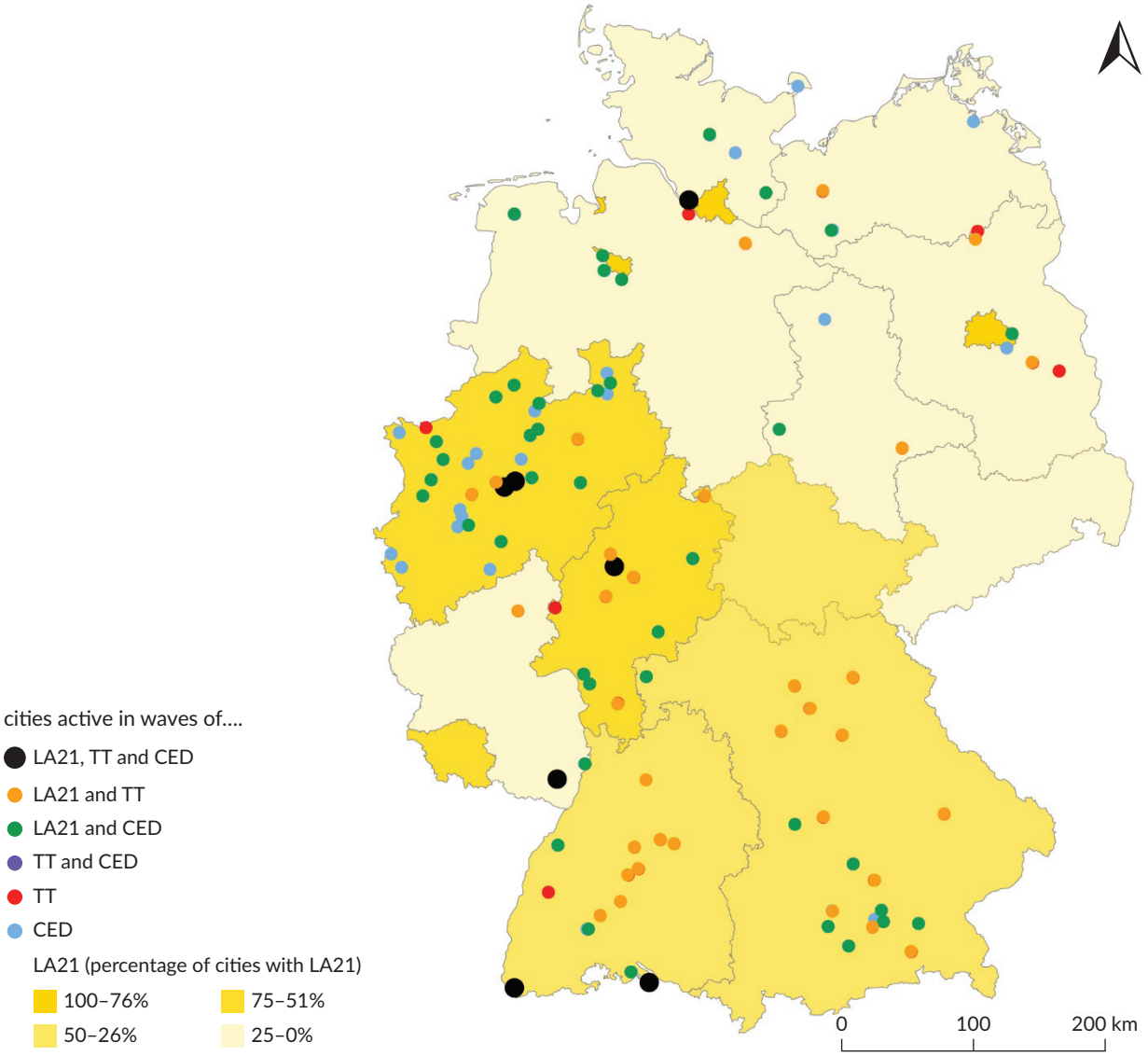

Figure 1. Map of German ordinary cities with CED, TT, and LA21 activities.

To investigate to what extent the selected cities qualify as ordinary, we revise whether cities are of higher importance despite their comparatively low size. The key data for the seven cities shows considerable differences with the number of inhabitants ranging from just under 23,000 in Herdecke to almost four times that number in Constance (over 87,000; Table 1). That the two largest cities are listed as higher-order centers in the central place system (Terfrüchte & Flex, 2018) despite having fewer than 100,000 inhabitants indicates the peripheral location of these ordinary cities: Their status exists due to the lack of major cities within easy reach. All other cities are middle-order centers within a metropolitan region. This role is often reflected in a lack of specialization, high commuter interdependencies, and subordinate public facilities. Only Lörrach and Landau function as the seat of the district administration in their surroundings or have independent city status.

The subordinate role of ordinary cities leads to significantly less attention within the multi-level system of spatial governance compared to metropolises. To evaluate the governance structure of climate politics, we

Table 1. Key data of German ordinary cities with CED, TT, and LA21 activities.

Municipality	State	Inhabitants (as of December 2022)	Centrality	Administrative function	Economic function
Herdecke	North Rhine-Westphalia	22,758	Middle-order center, part of Dortmund metropolitan region	Municipality	Mainly commuting, high income
Wedel	Schleswig-Holstein	34,538	Middle-order center, part of Hamburg metropolitan region	Municipality	Highly specialized production, commuting
Landau	Rhineland-Palatinate	47,610	Middle-order center, part of Rhine-Neckar metropolitan region	County-free city	Viticulture, broad economic base
Schwerte	North Rhine-Westphalia	46,658	Middle-order center, part of Dortmund metropolitan region	Municipality	Some production, public institutions, commuting
Lörrach	Baden-Württemberg	49,876	Middle-order center, part of Basel metropolitan region	County seat	Some production, public institutions, commuting
Marburg	Hesse	77,845	Peripheral higher-order city	County seat	University, specialized production and services (medicine)
Konstanz	Baden-Württemberg	87,355	Peripheral higher-order city	County seat	University, specialized production, public institutions

examine the role of local government, planning authorities, civil society, and citizens within the three waves. Unfortunately, very little data are available for the first wave. To measure trans-local connections of local climate politics, networks and the links to supra-local levels and other municipalities are examined in each case (Table 3).

On this basis, the case study Marburg was selected thanks to the particularly strong interlinkages, and it therefore represents the selection of a least likely case. By continuities/interlinkages, we refer to the references between the different waves in a city. The selection was not only concerned with the question of whether participation took place in each wave (on this basis, the seven cities were selected), but also whether a rhetorical or institutional connection between LA21, TT, and CED initiatives can be demonstrated. As will be shown, Marburg is the only city able to demonstrate this type of referential continuity, i.e., references between all three waves; thus, the city was selected for a more detailed analysis. A purposive sampling process was applied here to identify specific local actors from fields relevant to (climate) planning politics, such as representatives of civil society, municipal administration, press, and science), with whom structured interviews were conducted (Table 2). Extensive primary data were collected through eight guided interviews as part of Anton Brokow-Loga's dissertation project on the transformation processes of municipal climate governance in climate emergency municipalities and were analyzed in a secondary analysis for this

Table 2. List of interview partners.

Institution in the City of Marburg	Date of Interview	Code
Municipal administration	07.12.2023	MR1
Municipal administration	09.01.2024	MR2
Municipal politics	07.12.2023	MR3
Municipal politics	08.01.2024	MR4
Civil society	07.12.2023	MR5
Civil society	07.12.2023	MR6
Science	07.12.2023	MR7
Local press	11.12.2023	MR8

article. In addition, an analysis of Marburg urban policy and planning documents with thematic reference to LA21, TTs, and CEDs was carried out.

With regard to data analysis, the recorded interviews were anonymized, transcribed, and systematically coded using qualitative content analysis. Paraphrased or summarized statements are referenced in this article in anonymized form (e.g., MR1). Categories for evaluating interviews as well as results from document and website investigations were established, reviewed, and expanded both inductively and deductively. Thus, coding categories contained topics from the state of the art, such as institutional governance arrangements or the role of TMNs, as well as insights from the empirical material, such as personal continuities or coincidences. To reduce sampling and analysis bias, different researchers and assistants carried out the work separately, and the results were continuously triangulated and reflected upon.

The approach entails certain disadvantages and, thus, limitations. Data availability is a central problem in the exploratory studies on local references to other waves, especially due to the high reliance on internet sources, the scarcity of scientific studies, and the fact that some state-initialized databases have been scaled back. We were able to counter this problem with individual inquiries and triangulation with a more in-depth study. A second challenge is the desired comparability of historical processes: It quickly became apparent that TTs activated significantly different constellations of actors to the other two waves, which is also noticeable in the visibility of linkages. A third critical point is that only German cities could be analyzed here. The transferability of the research results is therefore limited.

4. Analysis of Interlinkages Between Climate Policy Waves in German Ordinary Cities

This first part of the analysis focuses intensively on the question of how the municipal activities within the frameworks of the three climate policy waves in German ordinary cities historically interlink with each other. However, these interlinkages are unevenly visible in the cities. After a look at the different temporal layers, at the end of this first analysis chapter, a type formation and the transition to the second analysis chapter and the correspondingly necessary case study take place. General information on the municipalities, trans-local networks, and references of local activities during the waves of LA21, TT, and CEDs can be found in Table 3.

Table 3. Analysis grid with trans-local networks and references of local activities during the three waves.

	LA21		TT			CED		
	Role of TMNs	References to trans-local activities	Role of NGO networks	Integration into trans-local structure	References to trans-local activities	Role of TMNs	Role of NGO networks	References to trans-local activities
Herdecke	Aalborg, ICLEI	X	X	X	X	Climate Alliance		X
Wedel	Aalborg, ICLEI	X	X					
Landau		X	X		X	Climate Alliance	Fridays for Future	X
Schwerte		X	X	X		Climate Alliance	Fridays for Future	X
Lörrach		X	X				Fridays for Future	
Marburg	ICLEI	X	X		X	Climate Alliance	Fridays for Future, Extinction Rebellion	X
Konstanz		X	X			Climate Alliance	Fridays for Future, Extinction Rebellion	X

4.1. Trans-Local Linkages

While the very use of the term LA21 refers to Agenda 21 as one of the final documents of the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro and this origin is usually also referred to in the documents, the network activities of ordinary cities are relatively limited. Memberships of the ICLEI and the signing of the *Charter of European Cities & Towns Towards Sustainability* (Aalborg Charter) were reviewed (European Conference on Sustainable Cities & Towns, 1994; ICLEI, 2023). Only the two smallest municipalities, Herdecke and Wedel, can provide evidence of both. The reverse is true for the TT initiatives, which all identify as part of an NGO network by being listed in the global directory of transition initiatives (Transition Netzwerk DACH, n.d.), but whose self-presentations rarely refer to this network or the origins of the TT movement. Again, exceptions are Herdecke and Marburg as well as Landau. The TT initiatives in Herdecke and Schwerte additionally resemble a special trans-local character as both have a twin structure acting as a common initiative with a larger, adjacent city (Witten, Dortmund), providing representation in two municipalities while using resources and capacities of one common group.

In CEDs, trans-local references are very present in resolutions and associated justifications. The Herdecke town council, for example, "calls on other municipalities, the federal states and the Federal Republic of Germany to follow the example of the towns of Constance, Kleve, Tönisvorst, Münster and Heidelberg" (Stadt Herdecke, 2019). Similar references to other municipalities and higher levels of government are made in all other cities surveyed. Even Constance's CED, which was the first in Germany, explicitly "calls on other

municipalities…to follow [its] example" (Stadt Konstanz, 2019). However, international trans-local references can only be found sporadically. Regarding integration into TMNs, the role of the Climate Alliance cannot be overlooked as it at an early stage self-determinedly disseminated, collected, and shared information, including templates for draft resolutions. It also supported participating municipalities in follow-up and implementation. In terms of embedding in social movement networks, a trans-locally networked local chapter of Fridays for Future or Extinction Rebellion usually triggered or pressured for action—a fact also mentioned by Satorras (2022) or Ruiz-Campillo et al. (2021). Noticeably, the larger the city, the more likely it is that local chapters of trans-locally networked social movements are involved in initiating the CED.

Taken together, we can observe a distinctive role of TMNs in the three waves. Thirty years ago, the LA21 was introduced by an intergovernmental global conference after it had been lobbied by a TMN (Coenen, 2009), but in the aftermath, municipalities in Germany were mostly left alone with the "call from Rio to the cities of the world" by the government (or governments as it was the competence of the Länder; Kissling, 1998). ICLEI itself had too few resources and was not visible enough as an advanced organization for the immense task, and other TMN activities such as the Aalborg Charter were formed later. Furthermore, the localist background of LA21 hindered a more extensive cooperation between municipalities (cf. Freeman, 1996; Young, 1997). This fundamentally changed in the next wave. Introduced as an academic and simultaneously grassroots project, TT never had the same aspirations as LA21 but was from the start equipped with a small-scale, yet visible TMN (Kenis & Mathijs, 2014; Maschkowski & Wanner, 2014). All TT initiatives we were able to identify in German municipalities were included in the TMN's dataset freely accessible online. However, TT with its narrower framework attracted many fewer members. With CEDs, there is a similar TMN at the core, but the organization is more virtual. Municipalities introducing a CED are not required to become members, but are seen as "soul mates" by the organizers and hence will be included into the database as soon as they know about the declaration via mass media and extensive and ongoing research. While TT initiatives are provided with a common overall concept, CEDs provides nothing more than a title or motto; other TMNs such as Climate Alliance and social movement organizations like Fridays for Future step in to facilitate information on enacting and implementing CED.

4.2. Trans-Temporal Linkages

Connections between the three waves of trans-municipal climate politics are much less widespread than between localities within one wave (Figure 2). Little continuity can be observed between LA21 and the TT movement, as Herdecke's TT initiative is the only one to mention the municipality's LA21. The local citizens' group appraises LA21 for "having been a promising start" but goes on to criticize the lack of implementation, "which is a pity" (Transition Town Witten, n.d., authors' translation). Still, the TT initiative also includes policies of sustainability from LA21. Landau's TT approach applies a concept of "wish production" originally used in many LA21 processes (Transition Town Landau, n.d., authors' translation).

Notwithstanding potential misinterpretation due to lacking data, we were able to identify three different trans-temporal trends:

- In the first type (Schwerte, Lörrach, Constance), participation in all three waves can be determined, but discontinuities can be observed.

- The second type shows a trans-temporal continuity or reference between LA21 and CEDs (Herdecke, Landau, Marburg). Presumably, the institutionalized capacities primarily led to the processing of the climate emergency tasks.
- The third type (Wedel, Marburg) shows links between TTs and CEDs. Here, temporally stable civil society cells provided the initial impetus for formative processes, including in administration.

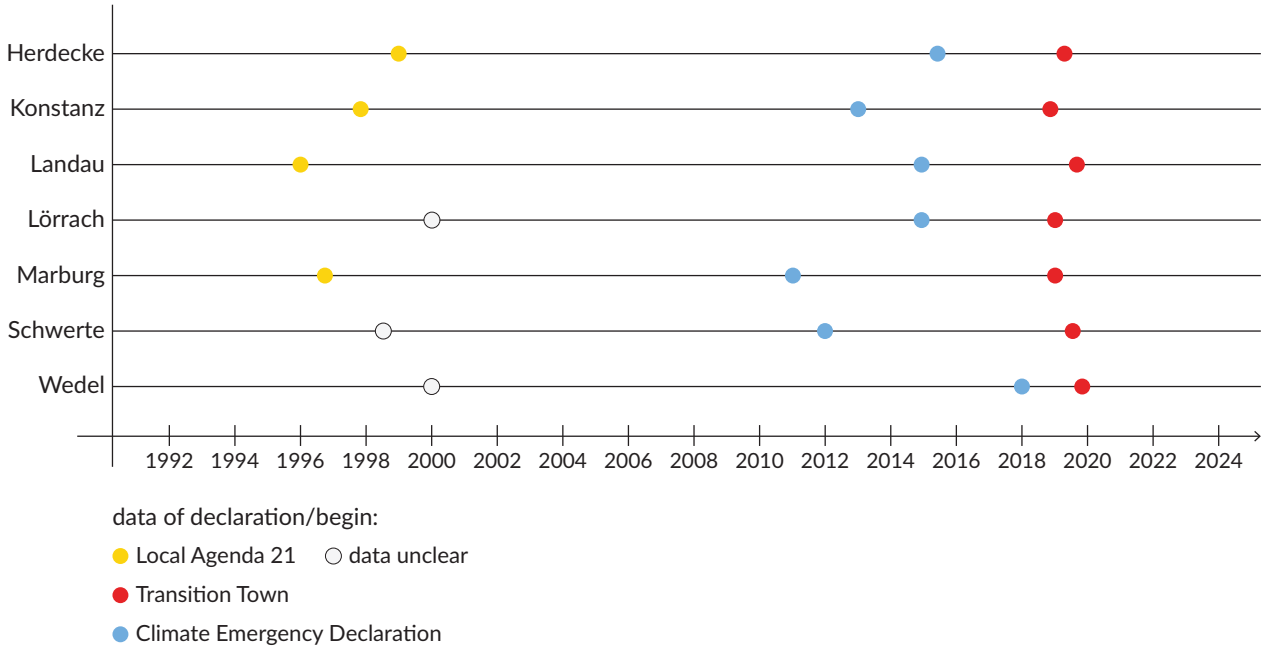

Figure 2. Trans-temporal climate politics in seven German cities.

As the city of Marburg has characteristics of both type 2 and type 3 and thus shows particular referential and institutional continuities, it will serve as a detailed case study to work out the features of trans-local climate policies.

5. Analysis of Referential Continuities and Actor Constellation in Marburg

In contrast to the predominant depiction in the literature (Freeman, 1996; Young, 1997), nearly all cities exhibit little activity by citizens and local civil society in the first wave (LA21). Instead, the municipality itself appears to have the organizing role with different departments such as the local planning authority being involved. Only in Schwerte was LA21 initiated by local civil society. The situation is quite different for the local TT initiatives, all of which are based on citizens' groups that at best have loose links to supra-local associations, local environmental associations, and existing citizens' initiatives, but relate to the basic concept of TT (s.a.). Local governments and planning authorities are only rarely named by TT initiatives and are regarded as addressees of demands or critique, but not cooperation. This is again in clear contrast to CEDs where it was always the city council passing the resolution, discussing measures, and initiating corresponding planning processes. Usually, a climate protection manager is entrusted with the process including local planning authorities. However, despite this high level of involvement, it was always civil society organizations that initiated the CED, while only in the three largest cities they also co-operated in the subsequent planning process. Yet even if a local citizens' initiative or civil society organization campaigns

for CED, the basic idea is that the municipality as a public entity declares the emergency and meanwhile acknowledges the need for action. The focus of further scientific research must therefore be on the concrete effects of (referential and institutional) continuities. Using Marburg as a detailed case study, how do referential continuities affect the local actor constellation in times of climate emergency?

The case of Marburg, a medium-sized city renowned mainly for one of the oldest universities in Germany, serves as an example of transformation processes with regard to trans-local and trans-temporal influences. All interviewees in Marburg mention a strong historical anchoring of environmental issues due to the university and politically active students (MR1, MR5, MR8). The LA21 process began in 1997 and intensified towards the end of that decade (MR6) with broad public involvement in eight thematic groups such as transport or economy (Lokale Agenda 21 Marburg, 2001) submitting concrete proposals for measures. However, in 2002/2003, the city council was unable to decide on these proposals and a year later would only "acknowledge" them. Despite this being a "participation trauma" to some participants (MR6), individual LA21 working groups still meet regularly voluntarily, receive support from the city administration, and continue to report to council committees, for more than twenty years now. In 2022, the LA21 working group on traffic referred to the CED and called for a halving of motorized private transport (Universitätsstadt Marburg, 2022). However, this position has since met with massive resistance from parts of the local population, including a successful referendum *against* the very same intention to halve car traffic (MR3, MR8). Not just as a side note: The implementation of democratically approved climate neutrality efforts is being turned completely on its head by referendums like this one.

After public protests in 2019 and 2020, the CED led to a climate action plan, an accelerated climate neutrality target for 2030, and a more comprehensive climate governance (Deutsch-Französisches Zukunftswerk & Stadt Marburg, 2021), which includes temporary citizens' councils and climate ambassadors (MR1, MR3, MR5). However, there are no explicit references to LA21 or the TT initiative, which was particularly active from 2011 to 2013, but like many other TT approaches was characterized by a low level of involvement in city administration and local politics. It also shared the loose networking structure and focus on bottom-up initiated projects such as Community Supported Agriculture, an annual education festival, or a cargo bike rental service (MR5). However, when the TT initiative faded to inexistence, in 2019 some members initiated the decisive participatory process leading to the local CED. In contrast to TT initiatives with little involvement, they took over the moderation of two events for the climate action plan and were funded by local authorities. This was done with explicit reference to Totnes, the TT's starting point:

> But what will this participation process look like? Who will shape it? In July, inspiration came from Totnes. There, Transition Town Totnes and many other partners organized an all-day event entitled "Totnes Declares a Climate Emergency—What's Next?" and expressly invited people to implement this concept in other cities. What if we did the same in Marburg? ("Bescherung," 2019, authors' translation)

While these experiences were passed on trans-locally to the now widely recognized process "Bonn4Future" (Irmisch et al., 2022, p. 34), these traces are lost in Marburg. The local TT initiatives name "Marburg in transition" has now become the title of the city council's sustainability brochure featuring second-hand stores, low-packaging shopping, and recycling. In Marburg, it is ultimately personnel continuity and informal relationships that ensure trans-temporal continuity. The person who coordinated LA21 in city administration became head of its environmental department, and shortly before retirement, initiated the decisive

steps for CED (MR6). Again, former TT members negotiated its participatory design ("Bescherung," 2019, authors' translation).

The case study shows that, in Marburg, successive cycles of environmental movement activities provided a current that was used by actors from local civil society groups to at least temporarily expand their influence on urban policy (MR6). These strategies were often the result of political circulation within very dynamic activist networks, which are facilitated in particular by the impact of the university—perhaps the least ordinary part of the ordinary city. This circulation is not unidirectional, but rather diffuse and multidimensional. However, the current was also used by the council to expand jobs or make them independent of funding (MR1), i.e., to ride the trans-local and trans-temporal waves for the often very ordinary perceived local good.

6. Conclusion

The empirical results of this article show that ordinary cities participate in trans-local and trans-temporal climate politics in very different ways. The case of Marburg in particular reveals how the three waves of municipal policy are omnipresent in urban policy practice and are strongly oriented towards the phases identified in this article. The theses of climate action politics that are mobile not only in trans-local (van der Heijden et al., 2019a), but also trans-temporal terms (Angelo & Wachsmuth, 2020) are clearly confirmed here. However, this cannot conceal that trans-local policy mobility to ordinary cities is lower than expected (Lee, 2015) at least within the German frame with its strong devolution of powers and little policy regulation from state and federal governments. The results should therefore be considered in context: There are 10,753 municipalities in Germany, of which 82 have more than 100,000 inhabitants. Given that there are 40 CEDs within the larger cities and only 66 among the ordinary cities and towns, the latter are clearly underrepresented. This is also because in our selection of seven case studies, TMNs are not the main source of policy mobility (for a broader picture cf. Busch et al., 2018; Domorenok et al., 2020). While five cities are members of Climate Alliance, networks in civil society and direct learning seem to be much stronger.

The first part of the research question is to be answered more explicitly here: How are the municipal activities within the frameworks of the three climate policy waves in German ordinary cities interlinked? With regard to the trans-local character of the resolutions and initiatives, the high degree of networking among the activists comes to the fore. The references to other cities in Germany are striking, although processes were also initiated by learning from other cities across national borders or urban policy networks (cf. Cook & Ward, 2011). Here, ordinary cities are not cities "off the map" (Robinson, 2002) but part of an ongoing debate among cities of different sizes and centrality. While ambivalent experiences of local failure can also lead to transformative successes elsewhere, local path dependency seems to be important. The trans-local activities during the initial and peak phases of the climate policy waves needed a fertile local ground so that continuous work was possible in the institutional structures of the new governance arrangements (Haupt & Coppola, 2019): environmental office, committees of the city council, deliberative panels. In the end, this continuity even in the "waves troughs" ensured that the municipal work went beyond concept development and resolutions, and included the important implementation work, too. The engagement in or collaboration with TMNs, which tends to be very strongly emphasized in research (Dyson & Harvey-Scholes, 2022; Lee, 2015), did not extend significantly beyond the initiating phase in any of the cases examined. This is contrary to the original assumption and puts this perspective in a different light for practice and research.

Although the trans-temporality of the three waves is clearly confirmed for the case studies, it is less substantiated elsewhere. As compared to 2,335 German ordinary cities committed to LA21, the waves of CEDs and especially TTs are comparatively low. While the CED criterium does by no means cover all cities with ambitious climate politics (Ruiz-Campillo et al., 2021), nor every trans-municipal activity, TT initiatives have not only been less successful in spreading trans-locally, but are also less connected trans-temporally. One reason is that TT is based on a radically different governance concept that does not allow for easy connections towards local politics and city administrations (Escobar, 2015). While there has been much reception to the concept in academia, local implementation is lagging behind. But even after a quarter of a century, today's CED activities rarely make direct reference to LA21. Given the importance and urgency of local climate politics today, the high continuity of these activities over the last decades proven by the Marburg case study is not necessarily relevant for local actors in their daily communication.

This makes some methodological notes necessary. The study has shown that the publicly available data is significantly less than expected, especially for the first two waves. This becomes particularly clear when analyzing ordinary cities. Only the in-depth investigation within the framework of qualitative case studies provides significant insights. The conceptual vagueness also makes qualitative analyses necessary. Despite the use of certain "labels," as LA21, TT, and CED ultimately all represent, and the associated support for trans-local ideas, this does not lead to standardized local policies but highly differentiated and sometimes contradicting approaches.

The iterative approach to the research for this article also brought to light a closer look at these references between the climate policy waves. The second part of the research question—how do referential continuities affect the local actor constellation, using Marburg as a case study?—is also to be answered more explicitly here. A closer look at the in-depth case study revealed the importance of personal aspects in local administration, politics, and civil society alike. These results from Marburg thus initially confirm earlier findings from planning research, particularly concerning the pre-decisive power of the administration and the role of informal networks in planning (Fox-Rogers & Murphy, 2014). Yet, the personal connections and even identities especially in the smaller cities researched do not necessarily lead to institutionalized involvement in municipal climate politics. The extent to which this is related to the size of the city is unclear, but it is noteworthy that civil society in ordinary cities may be too weak to participate in lengthy planning processes and the municipalities themselves have less capacity to enter into such collaborations. Like Haupt et al. (2021), however, this article refers to ordinary cities such as Konstanz and Marburg, which have a high proportion of their civil society actors recruited from the local university environment, which of course cannot exist everywhere. Informed by van der Heijden et al. (2019b), the article also highlights novel forms of agency and the engagement of social movement initiatives, companies, and education actors in multiple governance arrangements (Castán Broto et al., 2020; Haupt & Coppola, 2019). The specific role of these diverse actors as supporting pillars for urban climate policy might even become more urgent in the near future. In times of geostrategic tensions and a looming global economic and living cost crisis, new room for maneuver is not necessarily opening for chronically underfunded municipalities.

However, the most important intertemporal aspect of all three waves and the many individual local innovations to climate policy is something else: They are all directed to intergenerational justice (Brokow-Loga & Krüger, 2023). Therefore, and for the very different modes of governance at play, the three waves do not resemble "cycles of contention" (McAdam et al., 2001), but of cycle of *intention*. The very different actors, instruments,

and underlying concepts all contribute to a common idea, which also gave the title to the very first publication of the LA21 wave (cf. Fuhr et al., 2018): "Our Common Future."

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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