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The Hollowing-Out of British Climate Policy: National Indifference, European Leadership and Pioneer Cities

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Abstract

Since its rise to political saliency in the early 1990s, British governments have done much to establish themselves as leaders in international climate change politics. However, this passion for international targets and bold rhetoric has not been matched with a similar passion for domestic climate action. The widely acknowledged failure of the 2010 coalition government to fulfil its pledge to be the 'greenest government ever', frustrated the first genuine hopes that a British government could 'go green'. A governance gap has therefore developed, leading to the claim that climate policy within the UK has 'hollowed out'. This paper examines the extent to which hollowing out has occurred, with local government and the EU taking on the mantle of policy pioneers in place of national governments. In doing so, this case will be linked to issues of European governance that have been brought to the fore through the eurozone crisis and show how, in a time of economic turmoil and renewed calls for national sovereignty, the EU can renew its legitimacy by taking the popularity of the issue of climate change and the need for climate action and perform a function which has received relatively little attention from successive British governments.

Introduction

In the years of its rise into political saliency, the issue of climate change has received a mixed approach from successive British national governments. On the global stage, Britain has often stood out as something of a leader in international climate politics. Back at home, however, there has been little in the way of a truly dedicated national focus on the issue of climate change. This history of national indifference seemed to be coming to an end with the 2010 election of the Conservative Party under David Cameron in a coalition with Nick Clegg's Liberal Democrats. Cameron had previously campaigned under the slogan 'vote blue, go green' and from the beginning of his time in office had pledged support to the tackling of global warming. The mood has tangibly changed since these early days of the coalition, in late 2013 Cameron was infamously reported to have referred to green levies saying "cut all the green crap".¹ Clearly, the opportunity for national government in the UK to 'go green' has been wasted. However, in place of national government action, the UK's cities have taken a lead on climate change, and are out performing their European counter-parts in their climate mitigation and adaptation efforts.² Climate change has given the European Union (EU) the much needed cause it needs to renew its legitimacy in a time of economic turmoil and calls for increased state sovereignty. The EU has therefore become a major player on climate change, which has undoubtedly resonated with those cities that wish to take a lead on the issue. Within a Europeanised system of climate action, it would appear that British national indifference has not

¹ Kevin Schofield, 'Get Rid of the Green Crap', *The Sun*, 21st November 2013, p. 1

² R. Reckien, J. Flacke, R. J. Dawson, O. Heidrich, M. Olazabal, A. Foley, J. J.-P. Hamann, H. Orru, M. Salvia, S. De Gregorio Hurtado, D. Geneletti, F. Pietrapertosa, 'Climate Change Response in Europe: What's the Reality? Analysis of Adaptation and Mitigation Plans from 200 Urban Areas in 11 Countries', *Climate Change*, Vol. 122, No. 1-2, pp. 331-340

overly harmed the UK's cities' ability to act on global warming. Therefore, it is pertinent to suggest that a degree of hollowing-out has occurred within British climate policy. Hollowing-out, as developed by R. A. W. Rhodes refers to a system of multi-level governance, where the central level (national government) has taken a step back from policy control, to have the upper and lower levels of government fill-in its role to as much a degree as is possible. This essay will explore the extent to which it can be said that hollowing-out has occurred in British climate policy. Firstly by exploring the concept of hollowing-out, then by exploring the extent to which this term has goodness of fit to the climate policy context in Britain. Through an empirical analysis of how City Council's perceive their relationship with the UK and the EU on climate change mitigation, it shall be concluded that it can indeed be said that British climate politics is hollowed-out.

Hollowing-Out

The concept of the 'hollowing out' of the British state was brought to the attention of many through the work of R. A. W. Rhodes. Rhodes summarised the concept, describing it as 'the loss of functions upwards to the European Union, downwards to special-purpose bodies and outwards to agencies'.³ Rhodes contends that the hollowed-out state is one that has become 'a collection of inter-organizational networks made up of governmental and societal actors with no sovereign actor able to steer or regulate.'⁴ This term can therefore be seen to represent the nation-state, the established core of practiced politics, policy formation and the exercise of authority, losing its time-honoured centrality, as power becomes dispersed across multiple levels of governance. For the purposes of this study 'special-purpose bodies' shall be conceptualised as local government authorities, as they are the bodies to which power could be found to move downwards to.

To some this narrative would seem reminiscent of the often repeated discourses concerning the ultimate decline of the nation-state. Any such claims would be premature. Mann, having analysed four supposed existential threats to nation-states found all four to be more representative of hyperbole than the nation state's imminent demise.⁵ However, it is undeniable that there has been a significant shift in competencies from the state downwards, to the local level, and upwards, to the European. The extent to which this hollowing out is a process of Europeanization, rather than globalization, has been questioned. Holliday, in his critique of Rhodes' theory, dismisses the notion of Europeanization being the cause of any loss of sovereignty, instead moving the discussion to the effect globalization has had on state sovereignty, saying: 'it is difficult to move from the contention that globalisation has meant a change in the role and functions of the state to the argument that it is powerless and hollowed-out. The UK state has in some areas lost powers and policy space... But it continues to play a central role in others.'⁶ Rhodes himself acknowledges the criticism (though from a different course) stating that: 'external hollowing-out is not a function of Europeanization but of

³ R. A. W. Rhodes, *Understanding Governance: Policy Networks, Governance, Reflexivity and Accountability*, (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1997) p. 17

⁴ *Ibid* p. 57

⁵ Michael Mann, 'Has Globalization Ended the Rise and Rise of the Nation-State?', *Review of International Political Economy*, Vol. 4, No. 3, Autumn 1997, pp. 472-496

⁶ Ian Holliday, 'Is the British State Hollowing Out?', *The Political Quarterly*, Vol. 71, No. 2, April 2000, pp. 167-176

globalization.⁷ The evidence from Mann conflicts with these approaches, however. While Mann found that capitalist transformation (a clear characteristic of globalisation) worked to strengthen southern nation-states, through economic development, it weakened the nation-states of the north, especially those with the EU.⁸ This would indicate that there is at least a modicum of exceptionalism involved in the combined capitalist transformations of the EU's member states. Additionally, there seems little purpose in excluding one concept at the cost of the other as they are interrelated ideas, as stated by Le Galés: 'In terms of the redistribution of authority, the effects of globalization processes are in many ways mixed with Europeanization processes'.⁹ It seems worthy to hold onto the concept of Europeanization in light of this apparent exceptionalism and that one concept need not be used in exclusion of the other.

While globalization has surely played its part in the external hollowing-out of the British state, Europeanization has undoubtedly played a large part as well. This is clearly characterised in the development of internal hollowing out, that loss of functions by the state downwards to the level of local governments. Kern and Bulkeley have described European governance as having a growing multi-level character.¹⁰ It is this characteristic that has allowed local authorities to expand their competencies, to reinforce the process of internal hollowing-out. Kern and Bulkeley go on to state that Europeanization is not solely a process that is 'limited to the relationship between the EU and its member states: these dynamics are also relevant to the relations between EU institutions and local authorities'.¹¹ This relationship is described to have developed for three reasons:

'First, the EU's legal and financial instruments have an impact on local authorities (top-down vertical Europeanization)... Second, local authorities have begun to influence EU decision-making not only indirectly by lobbying at the national level through their national associations but also directly at the European level (bottom-up vertical Europeanization). Third, European cities and towns are becoming more Europeanized since they co-operate transnational, exchange experiences and jointly develop innovative solutions for problems with which they are similarly confronted (horizontal Europeanization).¹²

The three forms in which local authorities are subject to the process of Europeanization demonstrate how the nation-state can be sidelined within a European context. Whilst the EU was created through negotiations between individual sovereign states, nearly sixty years on from the signing of the Treaty of Rome the multi-level character that has developed within the EU has meant that member states no longer have the sovereignty and primacy they had before the agreement to commit to 'an ever closer union'. As reported by Le Galés, 'the state is losing its centrality in, and its – relative – monopoly of, public policy processes, and this is opening the field for political

⁷ R. A. W. Rhodes, *Understanding Governance: Policy Networks, Governance, Reflexivity and Accountability*, (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1997) p. 17

⁸ Michael Mann, 'Has Globalization Ended the Rise and Rise of the Nation-State?', *Review of International Political Economy*, Vol. 4, No. 3, Autumn 1997, pp. 472-496

⁹ Partick Le Galés, *European Cities: Social Conflicts and Governance*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) p. 86

¹⁰ Kristine Kern and Harriet Bulkeley, 'Cities, Europeanization and Multi-Level Governance: Governing Climate Change through Transnational Municipal Networks', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 47, No. 2, 2009, pp. 309-332

¹¹ *ibid*

¹² *ibid*

entrepreneurs, for instance actors within cities benefiting from a long tradition and legitimacy to mobilize around the territorial identity.¹³ This situation, a development of Europeanisation, does represent the possibility of the hollowing-out of British state power when placed within a multi-level, EU context. As noted earlier, Rhodes' theory describes a hollowed-out state as one with 'a collection of inter-organizational networks made up of governmental and societal actors with no sovereign actor able to steer or regulate.'¹⁴ This occurrence can therefore be seen to be one that has arisen through the relative inaction of government at the nation-state level, thus creating a hollowed out political context which is then reinforced by the local and supranational levels of governance working to fill the governance gap created. In the following section it will be proposed that this is the situation that developed in Britain around the need for climate policy.

There is reason to believe that this arrangement (of local and supranational levels of governance taking a primary role in the creation and implementation of climate policy) may be workable. In some quarters it has been claimed that local government action could be more beneficial than depending solely on national government. Jordan *et al* make the claim that governance at a localised level has certain qualities that are harder to reach at high spatial scales, namely: flexibility, accountability, transparency, and that 'greater local diversity may offer more opportunities for learning'.¹⁵ These points clearly demonstrate the benefit of organising climate action and climate policy at the local level but are tempered with the criticism that organisation at the level of local government means that there are 'fewer opportunities for successfully implementing what is learned across higher levels (i.e. harmonisation).¹⁶ The ability of the EU to successfully commit to harmonisation of climate policy has been established (as has a link between climate policy and European integration – reinforcing the process of Europeanization and the possibility of hollowing out).¹⁷ This is not to claim that the UK government's involvement in climate policy to date has been for nothing. Certainly, the UK has done much to establish itself in a position as a climate leader, as stated by Rayner and Jordan, it has done this 'both in terms of its international diplomatic efforts to raise the profile of climate change and its domestic emissions performance.'¹⁸ However, this does mean that with the UK government increasingly absent in the field of domestic climate action that climate mitigation efforts in the UK can continue albeit within a hollowed-out political context.

¹³ Partick Le Galés, *European Cities: Social Conflicts and Governance*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) p. 87

¹⁴ R. A. W. Rhodes, *Understanding Governance: Policy Networks, Governance, Reflexivity and Accountability*, (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1997) p. 17

¹⁵ Andrew Jordan, Dave Huitema, Tim Rayner, and Harro van Asselt, 'Governing the European Union: Policy Choices and Governing Dilemmas', in Andrew Jordan, Dave Huitema, Harro van Asselt, Tim Rayner, and Frans Berkhout eds., *Climate Change Policy in the European Union: Confronting the Dilemmas of Mitigations and Adaptation?*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)

¹⁶ *ibid*

¹⁷ Sebastian Oberthür and Marc Pallemmaerts, 'The EU's Internal and External Climate Policies: an Historical Overview', in Sebastian Oberthür and Marc Pallemmaerts eds., *The New Climate Policies of the European Union: Internal Legislation and Climate Diplomacy*, (Brussels: Brussels University Press, 2010)

¹⁸ Tim Rayner and Andrew Jordan 'The United Kingdom: A Paradoxical Leader?', in Rüdiger K. W. Wurzel and James Connelly eds., *The European Union as a Leader in International Climate Change Politics*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011)

The General Absence of Government Climate Leadership

Over the years of its political saliency, a firm stance on climate action has failed to materialise within successive British governments. Although the science behind the understanding of climate change goes back to the 1950s, it was not until the mid-1980s that the issue started to feature on European agendas and it was as late as the early 1990s that concrete action on the issue began to emerge.¹⁹ Immediately the UK government began to display its character on international climate agreements, at the 1992 UN climate summit in Rio the EU was unable to make a united pledge in favour of a number of measures, including different national reduction targets and the development of a target-sharing agreement, due to the opposition of Britain (which was joined in its opposition by Italy and France).²⁰ However, at Rio it was a British politician, Michael Howard, who facilitated the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.²¹ This beginning was one that would come to represent the approaches of latter British governments, with a focus on international agreements (in which it could be seen to be a leader, along with its work within the EU) that left much to be desired for domestic climate action.²²

The Conservative governments in the 1990s have been characterised by Carter as being generally ‘unsympathetic to environmental issues.’²³ There were some early domestic gains in the reduction of CO₂ emissions, however. Britain managed to get an early lead on other EU member states towards the meeting of its emissions targets. This did not represent any sense of climate-conviction at the centre of the UK’s governments; rather it was primarily the result of a change in the energy sources in Britain since the mid-1980s, as the increasing use of gas meant the reduction in use of the more heavy polluting oil and coal.²⁴ The ‘dash-for-gas’ did do much to help Britain’s emissions levels but failed to reflect the change of thinking at the heart of national government that was necessary to make it a pioneering actor within a multi-level system of climate policy creation. The 1997 election victory of the Labour party did little to change the status quo. A genuine push for effective and far reaching domestic climate policy failed to materialise on the national stage over the early years of Labour’s time in power. As noted by McLean, it was not until the years 2000-2006 that ‘UK politicians moved from no talk to cheap talk.’²⁵ Some big targets were made under the last Labour government, most notable was the delivery of the 2008 Climate Change Act which set a target for an

¹⁹ Elin Lerum Boasson and Jørgen Wettestad, *EU Climate Policy: Industry, Policy Interaction and External Environment*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013)

²⁰ Jørgen Wettestad, ‘The Complicated Development of EU Climate Policy’, in Joyeeta Gupta and Michael Grubb eds., *Climate Change and European Leadership: A Sustainable Role for Europe?*, (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000)

²¹ Tim Rayner and Andrew Jordan ‘The United Kingdom: A Paradoxical Leader?’, in Rüdiger K. W. Wurzel and James Connelly eds., *The European Union as a Leader in International Climate Change Politics*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011)

²² Neil Carter, ‘Combating Climate Change in the UK: Challenges and Obstacles’, *The Political Quarterly*, Vol. 79, No. 2, April-June 2008, pp. 194-205

²³ *ibid*

²⁴ Irene Lorenzoni, Sophie Nicholson-Cole, and Lorraine Whitmarsh, ‘Barriers Perceived to Engaging with Climate Change Among the UK Public and their Policy Implications’, *Global Environmental Change*, Vol. 17, No. 3-4, August – October 2007, pp. 445-459

²⁵ Iain McLean, ‘Climate Change and UK Politics: From Brynle Williams to Sir Nicholas Stern’, *The Political Quarterly*, Vol. 79, No. 2, April-June 2008, pp. 194-205

80% reduction of CO₂ emissions for their 1990s levels by 2050. However, this would appear to constitute grandstanding more than hard climate action. As one newspaper commented at the time; ‘the 2050 target is a very distant one and nobody is going to jail if it is not met. Hence the worries that the climate-change bill will in the end prove as fudgeable as other government commitments. And, ultimately, any future government can repeal it.’²⁶ In all, as the awareness of the dangers of climate change spread, they seemed to have been met with a high degree of British government apathy.

The Conservative Party in Opposition in the UK, after three successive and comfortable Labour victories, increasingly began to turn to climate change as a policy area with which they might be able to gain electoral support; this was especially the case under David Cameron’s leadership of the party in opposition, after being elected party leader he quickly made climate change his ‘signature issue’.²⁷ This was not only in stark contrast to previous stances held by the Conservative party, but also by Labour and, admittedly to a lesser extent, Liberal Democrat positions that saw did not see environmental issues as having much weight with the electorate, a fact that had long been reflected in the lack of environmental protection pledges that are made in the two main parties election manifestos.²⁸ In 2006, during local elections, Cameron unveiled the slogan ‘Vote blue, go green’ in order to demonstrate the primacy of focus that the Conservative party under his leadership would put on environmental issues, this along with the continued raising of environmental and climate issues raised his popularity with the electorate.²⁹ The Conservatives certainly fared well under their new-found environmentalism, gaining 316 seats in the 2006 local elections and eventually making their way back in government in 2010, albeit as part of Britain’s first coalition since the end of the Second World War.

After David Cameron’s Conservatives in opposition had brought climate change into the fore of modern British politics for the first time there was reason to believe that the coalition founded in 2010 with the Liberal Democrats (who of the three British parties had been shown the most environmental concern but with little if any policy impact) would be one that would be the first to take a big step forward and offer domestic climate governance. Indeed, Cameron, in one of his earliest speeches as Prime Minister, delivered at the Department of Energy and Climate Change, restated the extent of his commitment to the mitigation of climate change, saying: ‘We’ve got a big, big opportunity, here. I want us to be the greenest government ever – a very simple ambition and one that I’m absolutely committed to achieving.’³⁰ Although some gains in the field of climate action have been made under coalition the rhetoric has slowly slipped away as the focus has shifted from the benefits of climate change mitigation to the potential costs. Much of the blame for this change in

²⁶ ‘A Rod For Our Backs: Britain Decides that Climate Change is too Important to Leave to the Politicians’, *The Economist*, 20th November 2008, <http://www.economist.com/node/12641683> (accessed on 3rd March 2014)

²⁷ Neil Carter, ‘Vote Blue, Go Green? Cameron’s Conservatives and the Environment’, *The Political Quarterly*, Vol. 80, No. 2, April-June 2009, pp. 233-242

²⁸ Neil Carter, ‘Combating Climate Change in the UK: Challenges and Obstacles’, *The Political Quarterly*, Vol. 79, No. 2, April-June 2008, pp. 194-205

²⁹ Greg Philo and Catherine Happer, *Communicating Climate Change and Energy Security: New Methods in Understanding Audiences*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012)

³⁰ David Cameron, *PM’s Speech at DECC*, Department of Energy and Climate Change, London, 14th May 2010

rhetoric has been placed with the coalition's Chancellor George Osborne.³¹ Certainly the Chancellor has made clear his preference for reducing energy costs rather than see Britain pursue a role as a climate leader in an interview in *The Times* in September 2013, saying: 'I want to provide for the country the cheapest energy possible consistent with having a reliable supply and consistent with us playing our part in an international effort to tackle climate change. But I don't want us to be the only people out there in front of the rest of the world.'³² The attitude of the Chancellor seems to have proven influential over much of the government's approach to climate change. Cameron himself, during a period of heightened concern over energy prices, was reported to have ordered aides to "get rid of all the green crap",³³ in reference to the green levies that are placed on energy bills to fund insulation projects in order to raise energy efficiency and reduce carbon emissions. Whether this phrase was truly attributable to Cameron is questionable, however the case is representative of the failure of the 'greenest government ever' to truly ever set down its roots and flourish.

With the Conservatives under Cameron, who were the main drivers of widespread political engagement with climate change, seemingly turning their back on much of their green-rebrand it would appear that 'big opportunity' has been wasted, that the much needed strong, national government response to climate change has failed to materialise, with little indication that it will in the future. It is no surprise that *The Economist* newspaper has characterised British government's approaches to climate change saying 'British climate policy has never been short of grand visions... but made precious little progress toward cleaning up the British economy to meet it.'³⁴ This failure of the national level of governance to lead on this issue opens up the opportunity, caused by necessity, of the upper and lower levels of governance within a multilevel system to take increasingly centralised roles in a policy space that has seemingly been hollowed out by the apathy of successive UK governments.

European Leadership

That the EU has established itself as a leader in international climate politics and has done much to further the cause of mitigating climate change is widely accepted, however climate concerns are ones that are relatively new to the EU's agenda, as stated by Boasson and Wettestad:

'EU climate and energy policy was once a matter of minor political importance on the EU agenda, with issues like the internal market, enlargement and monetary policies ranking far higher. After a decade of severe political conflicts and primarily symbolic policy outcomes in the 1990s, climate policy soared from 'just another' part of EU environmental policy to become a high-profile policy area in its own right. Especially from 2005 onwards, the pace of developments has been rapid indeed. By the end of that decade, a range of new and

³¹ John Parnell and Ed King, 'Why did David Cameron Promise to Lead the 'Greenest Government Ever'', *RTCC*, 31st July 2013, <http://www.rtcc.org/2013/07/17/why-did-david-cameron-promise-to-lead-the-greenest-government-ever/> (accessed on 4th December 2013)

³² George Osborne interview by Alice Thomson, Rachel Sylvester, and Francis Elliott, "You cannot do a job like this and win a popularity contest"; As growth returns, the Chancellor is in confident mood – and after the Labour conference he spots a political opportunity', *The Times*, 28th September 2013, pp. 42-43

³³ Kevin Schofield, 'Get Rid of the Green Crap', *The Sun*, 21st November 2013, p. 1

³⁴ 'A Rod For Our Backs: Britain Decides that Climate Change is too Important to Leave to the Politicians', *The Economist*, 20th November 2008, <http://www.economist.com/node/12641683> (accessed on 3rd March 2013)

ambitious targets has been adopted. By the end of the decade, a range of new and ambitious targets had been adopted, complemented by a broad palette of tangible and binding policies.³⁵

The EU, like Britain, has made bold, rhetorical promises on the international stage, but has then followed through on these promises domestically, by taking the momentum from international agreements and taking them and shaping them into a European context in which they are able to reap results – although the current strength of commitment to climate action in Europe did take time to develop.

Taking centre stage in early climate debates, Europe was set to establish itself a sustainable leadership role in international climate change politics. However, early domestic realisation of this leadership role was ‘hampered by the fact that it failed to adopt a supranational carbon dioxide/energy tax’³⁶ (the failure of this tax was partly due to British opposition), the development of a ‘credibility gap’ on climate action in the 1990s,³⁷ and because there were few significant cuts to CO₂ emissions levels (cuts that did happen were more often the result of non-climate conscience action than not, i.e. German reunification). Perhaps the first major triumph of the EU in its climate leadership role, which was able to show leadership both domestically and internationally, was over the rescuing of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol. Kyoto began with widespread disagreements between the US and the EU over the introduction of a new environmental policy instrument – an emissions trading system (ETS) - the US initially supported the ETS and was faced with European opposition.³⁸ Ultimately, the US withdrew from the Protocol under President George W. Bush, leaving the Protocol unworkable in its current form. It had been agreed that the constituent nations had to account for 55% of world’s carbon emission; The US accounted for 36% of global CO₂ emissions at the time, therefore the country’s exit from Kyoto severely hurt chances of ratification.³⁹ The EU worked hard to ensure Kyoto’s success after the US backed out, as stated by van Shaik and Schunz:

‘In an effort to protect its achievement of a binding target enshrined in an international treaty, it not only argued for pursuing the ratification process, but – and this was unprecedented – it also made considerable diplomatic efforts outside the UN regime to assure that the multilateral agreement was indeed ‘saved’.⁴⁰

The EU did this by ensuring that Japan and Russia were willing to join the Protocol in order to reach the 55% threshold. With this target met, the stage was now set for domestication of the issue and for the EU to work towards solving the credibility gap that had developed over the previous decade.

³⁵ Elin Lerum Boasson and Jørgen Wettestad, *EU Climate Policy: Industry, Policy Interaction and External Environment*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013)

³⁶ Rüdiger K. W. Wurzel, ‘Environmental Policy: EU Actors, Leaders and Laggard States’, in Jack Hayward eds., *Leaderless Europe*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)

³⁷ Sebastian Oberthür and Claire Dupont, ‘The Council, the European Council, and International Climate Policy: From Symbolic Leadership to Leadership by Example’, in Rüdiger K. W. Wurzel and James Connelly eds., *The European Union as a Leader in International Climate Change Politics*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011)

³⁸ Chad Damro and Pilar Lauzes Méndez, ‘Emissions Trading a Kyoto: from EU Resistance to Union Innovation’, *Environmental Politics*, Vol. 12, No. 2, pp. 71-94

³⁹ Mustafa H. Babiker, Henry D. Jacoby, John M. Reilly, David M. Reihner, ‘The Evolution of a Climate Regime: Kyoto to Marrakech and Beyond’, *Environmental Science & Policy*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 2002, pp. 195-206

⁴⁰ Louise Van Schaik and Simon Schunz, ‘Explaining EU Activism and Impact in Global Climate Politics: is the Union a Norm- or Interest-Driven Actor?’, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 1, 2012, pp. 169-186

One of the ways that the EU was able to turn the leadership and agenda enforcing attitude they had shown on the international stage over the Kyoto Protocol and turn it into domestic action was through the adoption of the ETS. The introduction of emissions trading in Europe came about through a change of attitude amongst certain member states, as stated by Oberthur and Dupont: ‘several EU member states had a tradition of scepticism or even opposition to this policy instrument, it gained acceptance after the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol.’⁴¹ This represented a rather ironic change of affairs which highlighted the importance of the role Europe had taken on – the EU had gone from resisting America’s suggestion of an ETS to pioneering the applied use of an ETS to meet the targets set out in a Kyoto Protocol which did not even include the USA.

However, the EU was not the first to implement an ETS in Europe, in fact there were four major experiments with emissions trading before the EU ETS came into action, these being a UK ETS, a Danish CO₂ trading program, a Dutch offset program, and an international emissions trading scheme within BP.⁴² That the UK was one of these early movers might be an indicator of British leadership in the field of European climate action and also that the EU was forced to follow the example set by ‘pushers’ before difficulties in maintaining the integrity of the single market occurred. However, all four of these early projects have been criticised for their limited nature,⁴³ though no doubt important lessons from their experimental quality were learnt for the European application. For the current focus it is notable that there was little merit in the UK system compared to the European system that chronologically (rather than politically) followed, for example, initial pricing of the schemes showed the UK ETS to price carbon substantially lower than the corresponding price of carbon in the EU ETS.⁴⁴ Rather, than showing itself to be a European climate leader in this case, the UK (knowing that an EU ETS was soon to be created) was perhaps demonstrably trying to upload how it perceived that an emissions trading scheme should be. Uploading of this nature is common within the intergovernmental politics of the European Union. The benefits of uploading are twofold, as described by Börzel, ‘Firstly, uploading reduces the need for legal and administrative adaption in downloading, that is, incorporating European policies into national policy structures... Secondly, uploading prevents competitive disadvantages for domestic industry.’⁴⁵ This to some extent was successful, it has been noted that the UK and Denmark’s early emissions trading efforts influenced the developed of the European system.⁴⁶ Overall, the limited nature of the UK scheme did mean that the EU ETS and the UK ETS were largely incompatible, which has left the criticism that rather than be born out of climate conscience, the UK ETS was the result of the hope ‘to establish the City of

⁴¹ Sebastian Oberthür and Claire Dupont, ‘The Council, the European Council, and International Climate Policy: From Symbolic Leadership to Leadership by Example’, in Rüdiger K. W. Wurzel and James Connelly eds., *The European Union as a Leader in International Climate Change Politics*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011) p. 80

⁴² A. Denny Ellerman and Barbara K. Buchner, ‘The European Union Emissions Trading Scheme: Origins, Allocation, and Early Results’, *Review of Environmental Economics and Policy*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2007, pp. 66-87

⁴³ *ibid*

⁴⁴ Stephen Smith and Joseph Swierzbinski, ‘Assessing the Performance of the UK Emissions Trading Scheme’, *Environmental Resource Economics*, Vol. 37, No. 1, 2007, pp. 131-158

⁴⁵ Tanja A. Börzel, ‘Pace-Setting, Foot-Dragging, and Fence-Sitting: Member State Responses to Europeanization’, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 2, 2002, pp. 193-214

⁴⁶ Andrew Jordan, Harro van Asselt, Frans Berkhout, Dave Huitema, and Tim Rayner, ‘Understanding the Paradoxes of Multi-Level Governing: Climate Change Policy in the European Union’, *Global Environmental Politics*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2012, pp. 43-66

London as a global centre for emissions trading.⁴⁷ This leaves the EU as the established leader and pioneer of emissions trading in Europe, as pre-dating schemes were created because of the knowledge that an EU scheme was soon to be implemented.

Alongside the Kyoto commitments, the EU also set its own climate action goals in the form of the 2020 climate and energy package. This package has not been without criticism, perhaps most notably on the correspondence between the branding and the targets, as stated in *The Economist*: 'One of the least convincing things about the European Union's energy and climate policy is the brazen catchiness of its slogan: 20-20-20. This refers to a 20% reduction in carbon-dioxide emissions and a 20% share for renewable energy sources by 2020.'⁴⁸ Certainly, the numbers are a bit too convenient a fit to be entirely believable – in fact the European Commission followed this target by stating that the 20% should be changed to 30%, a move that was not made (perhaps because of the lack of numerical fit!). However, this independent target setting again shows European leader on climate change. The EU's target setting in this instance are supported by four complimentary pieces of legislation concerning the reform of the EU ETS, national targets for non-EU ETS emissions under the effort-sharing agreement, national renewable energy targets, and carbon capture and storage. Target setting of this kind, which is supported by binding legislation helps to establish the EU's role as a leader on climate change. It is especially comparable with the situation that has emerged in Britain, where in early 2014 the government announced that the country would not have a post-2020 renewable energy target. However, in a demonstration of how EU target setting can circumvent national climate inaction, Britain would still be obligated to meet the EU-wide targets for the consumption of renewable energy.⁴⁹

The case of the British government choosing to abandon a national post-2020 renewable energy target serves as an example of how the EU can also work to ensure continuity in climate policy. National governments can be found to only sporadically work for the furthering of efforts to tackle climate change, however once these efforts are uploaded to the EU, to the supranational level, it is much harder for them to be the subject of domestic backlash. This idea was proposed by Jänicke under the terminology of 'enforced leadership'.⁵⁰ Jänicke gives the example how Germany's leadership role on climate change was enforced by the EU: 'The Commission's rejection of the second German NAP (under the EU emissions trading scheme) and the modification of German pro-industry positions in the EU's climate change and energy package in December 2008 are good examples to illustrate this point. In both cases the German pioneer role was secured only by the EU.'⁵¹ This is a particularly valuable aspect of European leadership when the rhetoric on climate

⁴⁷ Stephen Smith and Joseph Swierzbinski, 'Assessing the Performance of the UK Emissions Trading Scheme', *Environmental Resource Economics*, Vol. 37, No. 1, 2007, pp. 131-158

⁴⁸ 'Two Into Three Won't Go; Europe and Climate Change', *The Economist*, 29th May 2010, <http://www.economist.com/node/16218370> (accessed on 11th March 2014)

⁴⁹ Fiona Harvey, 'Loss of Renewable Target is Backward Step in Fight Against Climate Change', *The Guardian*, 22nd January 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2014/jan/22/no-renewable-target-climate-change> (accessed on 19th February 2014)

⁵⁰ Martin Jänicke, 'German Climate Change Policy: Political and Economic Leadership', in Rüdiger K. W. Wurzel and James Connelly eds., *The European Union as a Leader in International Climate Change Politics*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011)

⁵¹ *ibid*

change and climate action begins to take an increasingly negative tone, as is the case in development of the 2010 coalition government dialogue on the matter.

Through the consistency that enforced leadership offers, the EU's leadership style on the issue of climate policy also becomes apparent. Hayward proposed the differentiation of styles of leadership along the lines of heroic versus humdrum.⁵² These contrasting styles of leadership have been well characterised by Wurzel and Connelly:

- *'Heroic* leadership relies on long-term objectives, strong policy coordination and the ambitious assertion of political will.
- *Humdrum* leadership is incremental, short-term and without the assertion of the ambitious assertion of political will.'

In the instance of climate policy formation and application in a multi-level context it is apparent that the EU adopts a more heroic leadership style than the contrast, humdrum, leadership that the British state has displayed. Whilst the EU's record on climate policy formation is not faultless (for instance, recent controversy over the 2030 climate and energy policy package which has been criticised for having set targets too low and been subject to delayed decision making) the EU has offered ambitious long-term goals, e.g. the Roadmap for moving to a competitive low carbon economy in 2050,⁵³ whilst also making those goals feasible through more frequent policy, e.g. the climate and energy policy packages. It would appear that the EU has adopted climate change as a cause on which it wishes to display this style of long-term and active leadership, as stated in the 2050 Roadmap: 'Climate change has long been recognised as one such long-term shaping factor where coherent EU action is needed, both inside the EU and internationally.'⁵⁴ Through the consistent work and dedication to climate action that the European Commission has offered, a heroic leadership style has developed, one that is not only preferable to the humdrum alternative but in light of the scientific proof of the necessity of workable climate policy, this form of leadership is a necessity in itself.

For the EU, the opportunity to offer leadership on the issue is invaluable. The issue is one that continually garners extremely high levels of public support across all member states, as Eurobarometer data has often reiterated. This high level of support remained relatively unscathed during the years of the eurozone crisis, therefore indicating that it is one issue on which the EU could rally support for the Europe project itself, if it could be seen as a major policy actor in the field. Importantly Eurobarometer data has also found that the European public widely (80%) see a link between tackling climate change and reaping economic rewards.⁵⁵ The concept of a 'green economy', which would link tackling climate change with economic gain, is one that is supported by

⁵² Jack Hayward, 'Introduction: Change and Choice: The Agenda of Planning', in Jack Hayward and Michael Watson eds., *Planning, Politics and Public Policy: The British, French and Italian Experience*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975)

⁵³ European Commission, 'Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and The Committee of the Regions: A Roadmap for moving to a competitive low carbon economy in 2050', COM(2009) 447 final, (Brussels: European Union: European Commission 2009)

⁵⁴ *ibid*

⁵⁵ Eurobarometer, 'Climate Change', *Special Eurobarometer 409 / Wave EB80.2 – TNS Opinion & Social*, (Brussels: European Commission, 2014)

the EU is its 2050 roadmap.⁵⁶ Therefore, if the EU can work towards climate goals whilst also working towards economic ones this could help combat some of the legitimacy problems that have arisen during the eurozone crisis. In a eurosceptic country such as the UK, where national government has shown not give the level of support necessary for successful climate policy, the EU's role on the issue highlights the importance of the European project, thus helping to renew the EU's legitimacy.

Pioneer Cities

Turning to cities as centres for the furthering of climate action has become an ever more popular notion in recent years. This point was stressed by the OECD Secretary General, Angel Gurría in 2007:

“In our cities, citizens, industries and institutions must respond to the challenges of technological change and globalisation. In our cities, as elsewhere, we must deal with the social implications of change... Urban areas could play a central role in successfully addressing global environmental challenges... Cities generate almost 70% of total gas emission... If cities fail to deal effectively with environmental challenges, our planet is in serious trouble.”⁵⁷

The sheer scale of emissions in the world's cities have led to them being focal points for the dangers of emissions in the short-term, one infamous example being the controversy over Beijing's air quality before and after the 2008 Olympic games hosted in the city.⁵⁸ Part of the reason that cities have become so central to debates over emissions levels is because of the sheer quantity of people that now inhabit them, as stated by Bulkeley: ‘the twentieth century witnessed a rapid process of urbanization... so that, by 2010, over half of the world's population lived within some form of urban context that is broadly understood as a ‘city’. By 2030, it is predicted that almost 5 billion of the world's 8 billion will live in cities’.⁵⁹ Additionally, it is in the interest of cities to see the mitigation of climate change, ‘they are particularly vulnerable to climate hazards due to their high density of people, assets, and infrastructure.’⁶⁰ Therefore, it should be of little surprise that cities are not only being recognised as the cause of much of global warming but also because of this creation of need

⁵⁶ European Commission, ‘Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and The Committee of the Regions: A Roadmap for moving to a competitive low carbon economy in 2050’, COM(2009) 447 final, (Brussels: European Union: European Commission 2009)

⁵⁷ José Angel Gurría, quoted in *Competitive Cities and Climate Change*, OECD Conference Proceedings, Milan, Italy, 9th-10th October 2008

⁵⁸ Yuyu Chen, Ginger Zhe Jin, Haresh Kumar, and Guang Shi, ‘The Promise of Beijing: Evaluating the Impact of the 2008 Olympic Games on Air Quality’, *Journal of Environmental Economics and Management*, Vol. 66, No. 1, 2013, pp. 424-443

⁵⁹ Harriet Bulkeley, *Cities and Climate Change*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013)

⁶⁰ R. Reckien, J. Flacke, R. J. Dawson, O. Heidrich, M. Olazabal, A. Foley, J. J.-P. Hamann, H. Orru, M. Salvia, S. De Gregorio Hurtado, D. Geneletti, F. Pietrapertosa, ‘Climate Change Response in Europe: What's the Reality? Analysis of Adaptation and Mitigation Plans from 200 Urban Areas in 11 Countries’, *Climate Change*, Vol. 122, No. 1-2, pp. 331-340

and because of their ability to become centres of innovation,⁶¹ cities are also being turned to as the source of many solutions to climate change.

It might be expected that the national track record for climate action in Britain would be reflected down onto the desire and ability amongst the UK's cities to see climate change as a cause that they can effectively act upon. However, it would appear that British cities have worked hard and overcome hesitancy of on the national level to offer leadership on the issue. In a 2014 study, Reicken *et al* analysed the climate mitigation and adaptation efforts of 200 large and medium cities in 11 European countries, the results of the study showed that British cities led their European peers in climate action efforts. On average, 65% of European cities had at least a mitigation plan, whereas in the UK 93% of those cities studied had a mitigation plan.⁶² For adaptation the UK also led the field with 80% of cities having an adaptation plan – compared to a 28% European average. The quantity of those British cities that could be described as 'climate leaders' exceeded those in the other European countries studies, as the map below demonstrates:

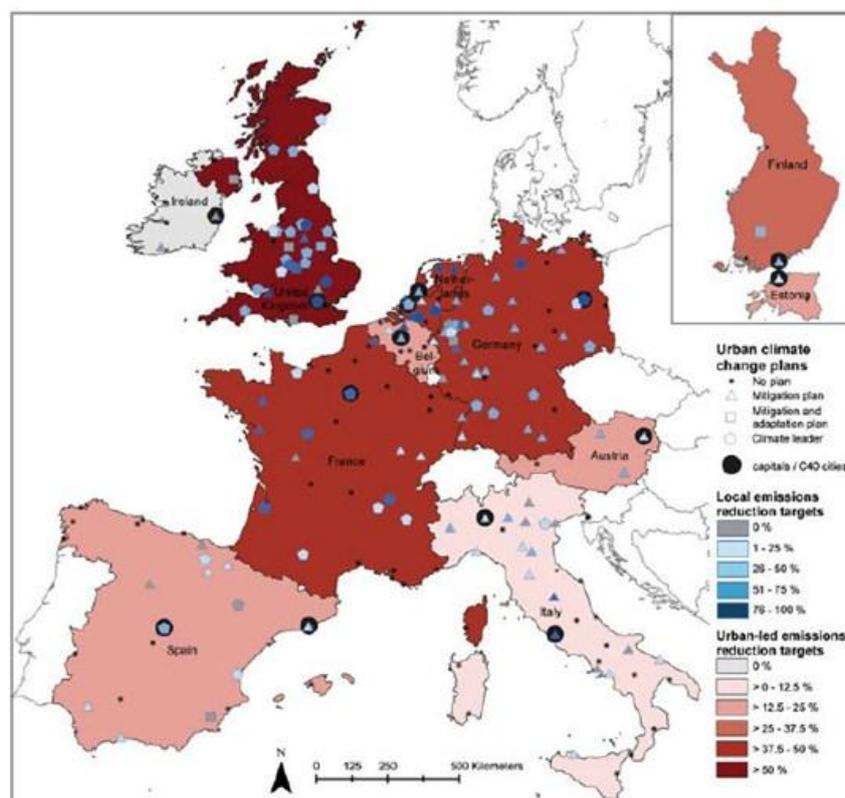


Figure 1: Map of European cities' climate change plans

It is therefore apparent that cities in the UK are able to operate within the context detailed above, where national government leadership and direction of climate change is not forthcoming; British cities have managed to pioneer themselves a role as climate leaders. How this situation may have

⁶¹ Nicos Komninos, *Intelligent Cities*, (London: Spon Press, 2002)

⁶² R. Reicken, J. Flacke, R. J. Dawson, O. Heidrich, M. Olazabal, A. Foley, J. J.-P. Hamann, H. Orru, M. Salvia, S. De Gregorio Hurtado, D. Geneletti, F. Pietrapertosa, 'Climate Change Response in Europe: What's the Reality? Analysis of Adaptation and Mitigation Plans from 200 Urban Areas in 11 Countries', *Climate Change*, Vol. 122, No. 1-2, pp. 331-340

developed is perhaps best reiterated by Le Galés: ‘the state is losing its centrality in, and its – relative – monopoly of, public policy processes, and this is opening the field for political entrepreneurs, for instance actors within cities benefiting from a long tradition and legitimacy to mobilize around the territorial identity.’⁶³ This situation is certainly one that would seem to reflect what Rhode’s would label as hollowing out, whereby the national government has experienced a loss of functions upwards to the European Union (through the leadership it can offer on climate change) and downwards to cities (through the practical application of climate action to a local context by local government).

Empirical Analysis of Pioneer Cities

In order to ascertain the extent to which it can be claim that the hollowing out of British climate policy has occurred is justified, an empirical analysis of City Councils approaches to climate mitigation has been undertaken, in which cities’ relationship with the EU and the British national government has been examined. This research was based on three hypotheses:

1. *Climate pioneer cities would have a more negative opinion of the British national government’s climate record than those cities that were not climate leaders*
2. *Cities performing better in their climate mitigation efforts would see the EU as a more ready source of leadership than national governments*
3. *Climate pioneer cities will make more use of organisational networks than their less-well performing counterparts do*

The ranking of cities’ mitigation efforts was adopted from Heidrich *et al*’s⁶⁴ investigation into the climate preparedness of 30 urban areas in the UK. Within the study four stages of climate change mitigation were listed:

- Assessment of emissions
- Mitigation planning
- Mitigation action
- Mitigation monitor and review

Cities were then scored on their progress along these stages, with a score of 3 being given to the stage being most advanced and a score of 0 given to a stage not yet begun upon. From this a range of scores has been compiled, where by a city that is yet to begin any climate mitigation efforts at all would score a 0 and where a city that was most advanced in all four mitigation stages could score a 12. A map with cities’ scores can be seen in Figure 2.

A sample of the nine best and eight worst performing cities was then taken in order to be the focus of the research, leaving a buffer of 13 middle-performing cities in order to demonstrate a separation between those cities that were advanced with their mitigation work and those that were not (the additional one of the ‘best cities’ was due to a tied score at the lower end of the group). Councillors and Council Officers responsible for their city’s climate policy were then contacted through either telephone interviews or through surveys in order to test the above hypothesis and explore whether

⁶³ Patrick Le Galés, *European Cities: Social Conflicts and Governance*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002)

⁶⁴ Oliver Heidrich, Richard J. Dawson, Diana Reckien, Claire L. Walsh, ‘Assessment of the Climate Preparedness of 30 Urban Areas in the UK’, *Climatic Change*, Vol. 120, No. 4, pp. 771-784

hollowing-out in British climate policy had occurred. All interviews were carried out under conditions of anonymity, and it was agreed that all data collected would not be linked to the person or Council responsible for its source, however, data and statements will be linked to whether the Council was a best or worst mitigation performer.

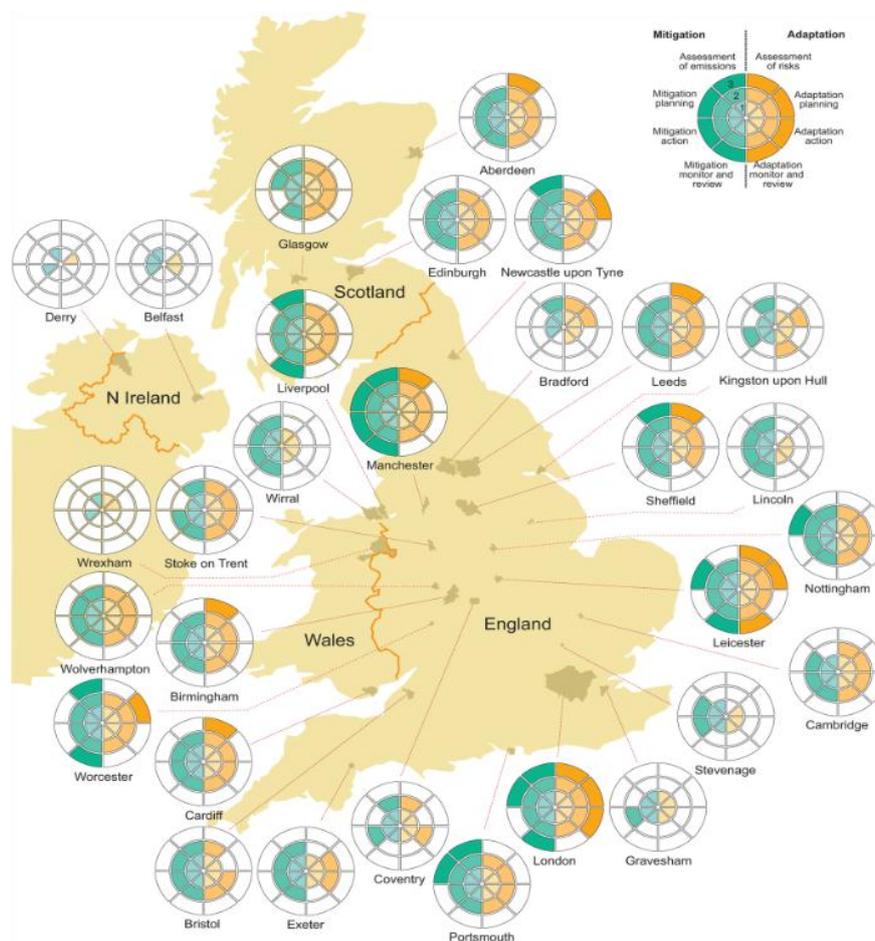


Figure 2: Urban areas and their Climate Change Preparedness Scores

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The first hypothesis to test is that ‘Climate leader cities would have a more negative opinion of the British national government’s climate record than those cities that were not climate leaders.’ Overall, very few of those interviewed offered any praise for the national government’s track record on climate change. However, one of the least mitigating cities linked successes it believed it had had to the Carbon Reduction Commitment (presently known as the CRC Energy Efficiency Scheme) which is a British government scheme to cut carbon. Interestingly, the scheme came under criticism when it was changed in the 2010 coalition government’s first spending review, from a re-distributive scheme that gave financial rewards (gathered as levies from the worst performing) to businesses and Council’s that best improved their energy efficiency to a system whereby all money gathered would be kept by the Treasury. The changes have been described as having the possibility of ‘serious negative implications for the government’s perceived commitment to cutting climate.’⁶⁶ This would

⁶⁵ Oliver Heidrich, Richard J. Dawson, Diana Reckien, Claire L. Walsh, ‘Assessment of the Climate Preparedness of 30 Urban Areas in the UK’, *Climatic Change*, Vol. 120, No. 4, pp. 771-784

⁶⁶ Ros Donald, ‘Report Suggests Need For Certainty on Business Carbon Reduction Legislation’, *Carbon Brief*, 17th May 2012,

seem to reflect poorly on the national government's record then, that the only praise that it had received was from a Council that had had scored a very low mitigation score and was for a program that has actually been called into question on its climate credentials.

Elsewhere, criticism for national government came from both most and least mitigating cities. Perhaps one of the most frequent criticisms of the national response to climate mitigation came from the lack of a consistent message, which led to high levels of uncertainty. When asked whether national government had ever made their City Council's mitigation program more difficult one Councillor replied:

'Yes they have – they have made it extremely difficult and extremely uncertain. The direction of policy travel for us and, more importantly, for business is extremely uncertain. From the comments about the "green crap", to the removal of eco-obligations for the energy companies, to creating a lot of uncertainty around the demand for renewables, these are all examples. It means that we can't get on and implement things that we want to do because the funding is slow or small or uncertain – it's all having a big impact.'

Consistency was highlighted amongst the majority of best performing Councils. When asked if the EU was offering them a more consistent approach to climate change issues than national government was, all of the best performing respondents either agreed or strongly agreed. Amongst the worst performing Councils this number dropped to a third of respondents. It would therefore seem apparent using the data gathered from this study, that the first hypothesis was proven correct - climate leader cities do have a more negative opinion of national government than those cities that were not climate leaders. However, it would seem that local government, whether good or bad at climate mitigation, has not had a successful relationship with national government in the process to date.

As already stated, all of the respondents from the cities with the best mitigation records saw the EU as a offering a more consistent approach to climate change than national government, this indicates how the second hypothesis (*'Cities performing better in their climate mitigation efforts would see the EU as a more ready source of leadership than national governments'*) also performed. The worst performing cities were far more sceptical of the role the EU had to offer, as one Council Officer claimed: 'The EU level is fairly distant in terms of leadership.' However, even amongst these cities there was praise for the EU, one Councillor noted that any major change in climate action was more likely to come from the European level than it was from elsewhere. Overall, a third of respondents amongst the worst performing Council's said they believed that the EU was a source of leadership on issues of climate change mitigation. Amongst the best performing Councils the record was much better however, 80% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the EU was a source of leadership on issues of climate change mitigation. One Councillor stated:

'The long term direction that is being set by the EU and the framework has been really helpful on things like waste and recycling, for example. And that's been going on for many

years, in a very clear direction, forcing national governments into action which in turn gets forced down to local authorities. For people that want to make change in the area that sort of framework is really helpful.'

Therefore it would be pertinent to conclude that second hypothesis was also proved correct, that those best performing cities did see the EU as a more ready source of leadership than they did national governments.

Lastly, and in support of the third research hypothesis (*'Climate pioneer cities will make more use of organisational networks than their less-well performing counterparts do'*), as well as finding leadership from the EU, a number of respondents reported that they were able to build their climate mitigation program through networking with other cities on the issue. Initiatives such as the Nottingham Declaration were given as an example of how British local government has taken on a pioneering role in climate mitigation. Formed in 2000, the Nottingham Declaration 'commits signatories to prepare a plan to address the causes and effects of climate change and to secure maximum benefits from action for their local communities.'⁶⁷ Bulkeley and Kern attribute the development of the Nottingham Declaration to the 'absence of central government direction'.⁶⁸ Clearly, this form of networking has been useful for Councils, in place of national government leadership, one Council went as far as to attribute the 'majority' of their climate change mitigation drive and strategies to UK-based networking support of this kind. As well as solely UK-based networking, some Councils made reference to wider European networks of support. Particular reference was made to the work of Energy Cities (the European Association of local authorities in energy transition) and to the EU-funded Building European Environmental and Maritime Skills project (though, naturally, this was limited to coastal cities) Primarily, these networks are exploited as sources of best practice guidance, according to respondents. A noticeable trend appeared in this respect, with climate leader cities much more likely to link their success to European and UK networks of support and idea sharing than their less well performing counterparts would.

Overall, from the evidence at hand, it would seem that cities within the UK, when acting on the issue of climate change, have felt a lack of government support and direction. This sense of feeling was particularly palpable amongst those cities that were furthest progressed with their climate action. From the track record of the successive British national governments on domestic climate policy, this is not a surprising development. However, the track record of UK cities, within this context of relative national government apathy, is notable. As previously stated, British cities have surpassed their European counterparts in their climate mitigation and adaptation activities. Clearly then, UK cities have been able to respond positively to the lack of government direction on the issue and been able to forge their own path using EU support as well as by networking with other local authorities, both in the UK and across Europe. This would support the notion that there has been a hollowing-out in British climate policy.

⁶⁷ Local Government Association, quoted in Harriet Bulkeley and Michele Betsill, 'Rethinking Sustainable Cities: Multilevel Governance and the 'Urban' Politics of Climate Change', *Environmental Politics*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 2005, pp. 42-63

⁶⁸ Harriet Bulkeley and Kristine Kern, 'Local Government and the Governing of Climate Change in Germany and the UK', *Urban Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 12, 2006, pp. 2237-2259

Conclusion

That there has been a history of national indifference to domestic climate policy on the part of successive national governments in the UK has been well established, the frustration with the 2010 coalition government, in the unrealised potential for national government in Britain to finally 'go green' has meant other actors no longer turn to central government for direction on the issue of global warming. National indifference has clearly been felt by local authorities in the UK, who have responded in kind by pioneering climate mitigation strategies. Varying degrees of success have been found amongst these cities records; however the overall picture for the UK is one where cities are forging ahead in both climate mitigation and adaptation. In place of the leadership role that national government would be expected to take, leadership functions seem to have transferred upwards to the European level. The EU has displayed itself as capable leader in tackling climate change and, importantly, has managed to maintain that leadership during times of severe economic pressure – thus helping to renew and reinforce the EU's legitimacy. With this transfer of functions downwards to local authorities and upwards to the EU, it is right to conclude that British climate politics can be described as having been hollowed-out.

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