14 Moving forward: Making equality, equity, and social justice central

Gunnhildur Lily Magnúsdóttir and Annica Kronsell

Fortunately, the climate crisis is increasingly recognised across the world. Associated with this recognition is a crisis discourse. While crises may encourage action, the crisis discourse also conveys a message that all individuals are implicated in the crises on equal terms and in equal ways. This is not the case. Paraphrasing Cynthia Enloe¹ (see also Chapter 3, this volume):

we are not all in this together. We're on the same rough seas, but we're in very different boats. And some of those boats are very leaky. And some of those boats were never given oars. And some of those boats have high-powered motors on them. We are not all in the same boat.

Enloe calls attention to the danger of a world where patriarchal and anthropocentric norms dominate and social differences are overlooked. This book highlighted those issues, and the relation between gender and social justice issues and climate issues, in particular, by concentrating on how institutions and policy-makers who are compelled to deal with climate issues can connect this activity with a sensitivity to social differences. Climate institutions are significant – we have argued – as they are responsible for steering toward climate objectives through strategies, incentives, guidelines, policies, roadmaps, and other actions that aim to mitigate as well as adapt to climate change. Furthermore, climate institutions enact power and affect power relations by promoting certain norms and values through policies and by distributing resources and, in turn, engaging specific actors.

This book explored if and how climate institutions in industrialised states recognise and understand the relevance of gender and other social differences in their climate policy-making. In democracies, they have an obligation to do so. We find that they do, but mostly from a very narrow understanding of gender. We have argued that equality, equity, and social justice are so central to climate mitigation and adaptation, that they should be key considerations in climate policies and actions, not only for democratic and justice reasons but also for substantive reasons. Not least on the occasions when gender, social justice, and climate objectives can be mutually supportive, such as if women's transport and waste management behaviour becomes normative it could also lead to reduced emissions (Chapters 6, 7, 8, 9, and 11, this volume), but is more tenuous at other times

such as in hegemonic masculine areas – for example, in the construction sector (Chapters 9 and 10, this volume), responses to natural disasters (Chapter 13, this volume), and in shaping opinions on climate change, masculinity, and care for Earth (Chapter 12, this volume).

Path dependence, ‘sticky’ institutions and eco-technological framing

We departed from a feminist institutional framework to locate the main institutional challenges and barriers to further inclusion of climate-relevant social factors and, in particular, gender in climate policy-making, and applied the concepts of path dependence and ‘stickiness’, which lays out the course of action of climate institutions and limits the scope of policy-makers and other actors for innovation and new paths in climate policy-making.

We identified path dependence in most chapters. Ecological modernisation emerged as a path dependence that is structuring climate institutions in industrialised states and can be said to have substantial power of the climate agenda in general. Ecological modernisation centres around the idea that climate issues can be resolved in tandem and harmoniously with continued economic growth, and increase wealth and prosperity, as the market adjusts resource and energy use through prize mechanisms and from a continuum of innovations. This is not explicitly or discussed at length in any of the chapters, but rather forms a type of normal condition. This powerful normality informs and structures climate policy-making so that it will privilege efficiency arguments and technical knowledge over other types of knowledge that could help address social issues.

Second, patterns of path dependence can be traced in climate policy-making at all levels, from intergovernmental actors such as the UN and EU to local authorities and actors. At the UN level, efforts toward social inclusivity are hampered by path dependencies related to the characteristic of the international legal system (Chapter 2, this volume). In particular, state sovereignty means there is limited enforcement capacity when it is based on state consent, thus, even when international institutions such as the UNFCCC have established rules on gender they are politically constrained in getting states to follow through, even on the commitments that they have agreed to. At the EU level, climate change path dependence concerned the topic of climate change and its framing as a developmental issue which later became tinged by foreign and security concern leading to a prioritisation overriding gender concerns. On the other hand, the fact that in the EU gender equality is a fundamental value, formal commitments to gender equality and gender mainstreaming which has mainly been related to the labour market, can possibly come into play in cases where climate change is framed as a problem in internal policies (EU green deal). So far, ‘efforts to address gender inequality and efforts to address climate change continue to run in parallel rather than being integrated into each other’ due to institutional stickiness and path dependence (Chapter 3, this volume).

Second, climate policy is a very broad field of action, and climate institutions are many. State and local authorities, such as the case of Germany (Chapter 4, this

volume) and Sweden (Chapters 5 and 6) may very well develop ways to integrate equality and equity issues, but whether they will be realised, or not, is constrained by priorities and previous choices in other ministries and other sectors, like construction, transport, and energy (Chapters 7, 9, 10, and 11). The focus tends to be on economic interests and technical solutions in line with the dominant norms of ecological modernisation (Chapter 12), when what is likely needed is more focus on public interest and welfare. This means that research on climate change, in general and within sectors, has not advanced the studies of social effects and implications. As argued, there is a huge gap in knowledge among policy-makers.

Third, a barrier found in many of the institutions and sectors, as highlighted in the book, is a hegemonic masculine environment which results in the imbalanced representation of men and women – and sometimes also limited recognition of marginalised social groups. This barrier is not only found in formal climate institutions such as in Swedish, Danish, and German ministries (Chapters 4, 5, and 7), but also in different sectors, such as the transport sector, European waste management (Chapter 8), and in European and North-American construction (Chapters 9 and 10). There are a number of tools available for climate policy-makers, such as gender mainstreaming, but the low representation of women and marginalised groups makes gender mainstreaming and intersectionality appear less appropriate and might make policy-makers insensitive to climate-relevant differences in behaviour as, for example, transport patterns (Chapter 11) and responses to and effects of climate change, such as severe wildfires in Canada, on different social groups (Chapter 13). Imbalanced representation and limited recognition of intersectional social factors, relevant to climate change, do not only risk making climate strategies less effective, when targeting the general population but can also be seen as a signal of democratic deficit and limited environmental and even economic justice in climate politics.

Fourth, civil servants who work in formal climate institutions and often find themselves in path dependent institutional environments, characterised by eco-modernisation and limited intersectional understanding are faced with democratic challenges. Those civil servants are limited by the legal framework of the work within (Chapter 2, this volume), the administrative context and logic and the mandate they have from their governments. They are often aware that in order to maintain validity and credibility in policy-making, their actions and ideas have to fit within a given framework that is deemed legitimate by both the public and politicians (Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7).

Finally, climate change action is set in a frame of time urgency. There is an urgent need to reduce carbon emissions even by the set dates of 2030 and 2050, which puts stress on the policy-makers to find ways to enact this. At the same time, social transformation takes time and as Alber et al. (Chapter 4, this volume) state; ‘climate protection specialists in the ministry are chronically overloaded’. Hence, even if they are willing and able to work with gender it cannot take too much time, and a genuine intersectional approach would make it even more time-consuming. Such approaches require that gender and intersectional research are taken into account and that developed policies are monitored and

evaluated. A very important issue, then, is how is this doable within the stressful timeframe of climate policy-making today? Is it possible to move this quickly? Is it even desirable, or are stressed and overworked policy-makers more likely to follow a path-dependent logic of appropriateness and stick to familiar strategies in their policy-making, which might favour certain social groups, and knowledge.

Potentials and suggestions for advancing equality and social justice

Moving on to the opportunities to advance equality and social justice issues in climate policy-making, we revisit the following question:

What and where are the main opportunities to advance gender equality, equity, and social justice within climate institutions?

Issues relating to social inclusion and climate change do surface in climate institutions in industrial states, but they tend to run in parallel with limited coordination between them. These issues must be addressed in cross-cutting ways at many levels, in terms of formal policy-making in climate institutions at different levels, cooperating on a global level with the UN at the forefront, to local initiatives at the municipal level. Furthermore, a just and socially sustainable climate policy-making requires further coordination between different policies and sectors vital to climate mitigation and adaptation, and a common understanding of the intersectional nature of climate change and its effects.

Apart from cross-cutting cooperation, coordination, and a common understanding, gender experts, femocrats, and other civil servants – with a profound understanding and knowledge of social justice issues – who might perceive themselves as inside-activists, are important. Their leeway for innovation is, however, limited due to the aforementioned institutional barriers, but existing formal legal frameworks on gender and social inclusion are crucial building blocks for pursuing equality and equity in institutions.

The strategy of gender mainstreaming is, for example, of importance when discussing formal remedies, but it has to date often merely been a limited addition to existing policies. Gender mainstreaming still has the potential to advance socially just climate policies since it is a dynamic tool which can be broadened to include both new gender perspectives, as well as knowledge of other intersecting social factors, in everyday policy-making. However, none of these potentials and suggested approaches are sufficient on their own and what is being called for is a new thinking and a transformative and sustainable way of integrating gender and intersectionality with all climate policy-making initiatives, which challenges the current path dependencies of the institutions in which climate action is enabled.

Note

- 1 The Quaker European Office (Brussels) April 13, 2020; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gaif6mTwFw8>