

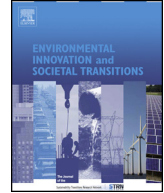


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# Gender and transition in climate governance<sup>☆</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

This article demonstrates how gender is relevant to governance of a transition to a low-carbon economy. It does this through insights derived from gender and transition studies in combination, applied and illustrated through a study of climate governance in Sweden. The approach is constructive and uses as central concepts: transition arenas, niches, regimes and landscapes in combination with theories from gender studies. The article suggests that the two fields are linked through three processes that are necessary to make a transition: to strengthen participation, to deal with oppressive power relations and to challenge institutionalized norms. It illustrates how masculine norms seem to permeate the landscape of climate transitions and argues that gender regimes tend to dictate planning, measures and implementation. Finally, the article proposes that a gender perspective on climate governance would analyze participation in transition arenas and niches by asking who is included in climate governance and what ideas influence climate policies.

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## 1. Introduction

The societal transitions assumed to be necessary for reaching the climate objectives set by governments, for example in EU member states, imply unprecedented challenges to political institutions and

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to society as a whole. Gender relations are likely implicated in such large-scale changes as gender is a crucial principle of social organization (Eduards, 2002; Hirdman, 1990, 2001; Wahl and Holgersson, 2004; Walby, 2009). Hence, it is a relevant aspect to discuss in relation to ways of governance involved in re-organizing politics and society toward climate objectives.<sup>1</sup> This article uses a combination of transition and gender theories as a heuristic device to illustrate how gender relations are relevant for climate governance. It is neither intended as a critique of the theories<sup>2</sup> nor as a way to develop theory. The objective is to present a constructive argument about the relevance and manifestations of gender at diverse levels of action contributing to climate policies and approaches. In making the argument I will address specific concerns that combine elements and insights from transition and gender theories. To do so, it is necessary to simplify and generalize what is actually a broad range of diverse perspectives and theories. This article concentrates on three specific suggestions or arguments deemed relevant in both theoretical fields. The suggestions are: that gender perspectives concern participation and involvement in climate governance; that gender perspectives call for the recognition of inequities and injustices in the power relations of climate governance and; that norms related to masculinity are highly relevant to understanding the role of gender in climate transitions.

Both theoretical fields aspire to study change and often include a normative element. Generally speaking, the main aspiration of transition theory is to transition to a carbon neutral and sustainable society. This is particularly relevant for the work analyzed here, which is mainly from the Northern European sustainable transition research community.<sup>3</sup> The common vision for gender theory is the post-patriarchal society. Gender theory is a general term that includes research from feminist theorists, intersectional and masculinity studies. Gender concerns the social organization around the difference between men and women, masculinity and femininity (Connell, 2002: 9). Gender is expressed at many levels. It is related to individual identity, to knowledge production, to the interaction between individuals, to institutional and to cultural practices. It is both material and ideational. As a power relation, gender intersects and is interrelated to other forms of power and to differences in political agency and access to resources (Lykke, 2010). Gender scholars speak about a gender power order (Hirdman, 1990, 2001) that structures policymaking and institutions. Walby (2009) uses the term 'regime' to delineate systems of inequalities, in which the gender regime is part of other complex systems. Albeit, stemming from quite diverse social theories and contexts, I argue that the two fields of theory can be linked via three arguments on what is necessary to make a transition: the need to challenge institutionalized norms and deal with oppressive power relationships as well as increasing participation.

## 2. Three arguments combining insights from gender and transition studies

The transition approach taps into a rich governance literature that can be analytical, normative or critical but which has a common interest in understanding processes of steering (Cajvaneanu, 2011). Governance involves a plurality of actors and governing processes at different levels including governments and administrations. The transition theories referred to in this study are a subset within the governance research field. Transition theories are particularly interested in governance for transformation often toward sustainability or climate objectives. It proposes three analytical levels; *niches* – the setting where innovations take place, *regimes* – the networks and institutions with vested interests in the current order, and the normative or cultural *landscapes* in which the other two levels are embedded (Grin et al., 2011). Similar analytical levels can be found in the field of gender studies and are, to some extent, also related to different perspectives in feminist theory. Constructivist feminists tend to address the landscape or the gender order, materialist feminists the gender regime and liberal and standpoint feminists the role of participation. These links form the common structure for the article and the three arguments.

<sup>1</sup> Climate objectives can be articulated in different ways, often more generally as CO<sub>2</sub> emission reduction levels or as fossil fuel independence, but in strategies and policies also in more practical terms as the increase in public transport, investments in biogas technology, taxes on energy and fuel, etc.

<sup>2</sup> There has been ample critique of transition theory, for a systematic overview, see Geels (2011).

<sup>3</sup> Sustainability Transitions Research Network <http://www.transitionsnetwork.org> (accessed May 11, 2012).

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