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## **Innovation in policy: The emergence of climate adaptation as a new policy field**

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## Summary

Public policy is constantly in flux, changing and evolving to address the demands of the body politic and/or pressures put on it. In some sense policy innovation and change can be seen as an adaptive response to cope with new or existing, real or perceived problems and issues within societies. The climate too is in flux and if scientific predictions are correct, the impacts of anthropogenic climate change could have damaging or potentially catastrophic effects on human and ecological systems. As such, many European governments are seeking to respond to this pressure by creating new policies, programs and institutions that can help cope with or overcome the impacts of a changing climate, so-called climate change adaptation. This thesis researches the question of whether the growth and expansion of climate change adaptation policy in Europe is leading to the development and emergence of a new field of public policy in one or several countries. Additionally, this research seeks to conceptualize how new fields of public policy actually begin to take form and develop.

Interestingly, as a unit of analysis, policy fields are widely studied in the social sciences. However, the definition of policy fields such as environmental policy or agricultural policy is taken for granted. Oddly for such a common concept, very little attention is paid to what specifically policy fields are or how they can be conceptualized and identified. Given these short-comings, this thesis begins to fill this gap by theoretically defining what a policy field is by identifying and assigning their characteristics and dynamics so that they can be empirically measured. As such I define a policy field as: as a unit of governing within the socio-political system of a country where there exists three pillars working in tandem to support each other in the management of a public issue or set of issues: substantive authority, institutional order, and substantive expertise. Substantive authority relates to policies, institutional order relates to the institutions and organizations that deliver policies, and substantive expertise relates to the people in charge of making policies.

Having defined what a policy field is, this thesis further sets out to empirically map where and to what degree adaptation is emerging as a policy field. And to theoretically and empirically explore the drivers underpinning policy field emergence. Based upon a survey of leading adaptation policy makers in 27 European countries, I show that there are signs of adaptation becoming a policy field in 15 countries. Furthermore, I find that while institutional change, coupled with increasing public attention and pressure on governments to react to climate change, has helped drive the emergence of adaptation as a

new policy field, it appears that it is the activities of elite policy makers and experts that have had the most influence.

Following these findings this thesis digs deeper into the possible hypothesis that elites were the driving force behind the emergence of new policy fields. Using England as a case study - the country showing the highest degree of adaptation as a policy field – a series of focused interviews were conducted with adaptation policy experts there. The results show that indeed elite policy communities are responsible for new policy fields. Specifically, new policy fields take root when existing policy elites are dissatisfied with the evolution of the old policy field they are embedded in and sense an opportunity to strengthen or expand their position within that field in regards to their particular issue. In an effort to expand and strengthen their position, they lobby for and are successful in gaining new forms of policy. Once these new forms of policy are established and begin to be implemented, the emergence of a new policy field becomes apparent. First, the oversight power of elites (in regards to their issue) gradually, over time expands and strengthens. Secondly, over time, the implementation of the new policies creates and attracts a new and wider base of people to the policy issue. Finally, once the new policies are in place within the context of the strengthened institutions and new and expanded policy expertise is established, a new policy field can be created.

In sum, this thesis represents the first combination of conceptual and empirical work in an attempt to hypothesize how policy fields might emerge. By cracking the door open with the analysis, I hope to lay the foundations for future work that is deeper and more refined in its investigation, not only of policy field emergence but equally climate change adaptation. The study of policy change is too often limited to changes within fields. By expanding the focus towards field emergence I hope to capture a completely different dynamic of governance as it relates to large-scale policy change. In relation to adaptation, given climate change has been characterized as one of the greatest challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, how governments choose to govern adaptation will significantly influence their ability to respond to climate pressures. Studying what and how countries have done thus far, can offer guidance for those countries just beginning to undertake adaptation.