

# Approaches to local climate action in Colorado



Julie Huang<sup>1</sup> & Michele Betsill<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Departments of Geophysical Sciences & Public Policy, University of Chicago

<sup>2</sup>Department of Political Science, Colorado State University, Fort Collins



## Introduction

- Internship with non-profit Rocky Mountain Climate Organization (RMCO)
- This research addresses several factors that affect local climate mitigation policy adoption, namely:
  - Lack of expertise or data (Krause 2011)
  - Limited resources, human and financial
  - Community engagement
  - The influence of neighboring jurisdictions (Pitt 2010)
- Our goal is to provide municipalities with how-to guides to adopting successfully implemented climate action programs that are based on model practices
- The focus is on cities and the local scale because reframing the issue of responding to climate change in local terms has been effective in mobilizing climate action in cities (Bulkeley 2010)

## Research Methods

### Research Design

- 1) 13 in-depth case studies, programs/cities selected by RMCO
- 2) Covered four categories of local model practices/climate action programs:

- Climate Action Plans (CAPs)
- Energy Efficiency Programs
- Renewable Energy Programs
- Transportation/Land Use Programs

### Data Collection

- Documents, e.g. annual reports, city/program websites, community guides
- Email correspondence with program managers/city officials
- Phone interviews and follow-up/fact-checking

### Data Analysis

- Narrative description of the initiative
  - Broad description of the program, its administrative group, goals and elements
  - Key partners
  - Date of adoption, initial impetus
  - Broad indicators of success
- Identification and detailed description of practice components/overview of plan elements
  - Target audiences, overall targets for reductions in GHG, sectors covered (e.g. transportation, energy efficiency/supply, municipal operations, waste management)
  - Mechanisms for implementation, recommended actions by sector
  - Timelines
- Indicators of success in greater detail
  - Market penetration
  - Heat-trapping gas (GHG) reductions
  - Cost-effectiveness, savings
- Messaging description and adoption process
  - Gaining approval of management and governing bodies (city councils, county commissions, boards of directors)
  - Efforts to engage target audiences, including strategies to engage residents and businesses
  - Examples of marketing materials used and/or media coverage
- Meta-analysis of all cases to identify overarching lessons and trends

## Main Findings

### Multiple Modes of Governing

➤ We examined two dimensions of local climate governance:

#### 1) The level of focus on climate change

A) Some programs are explicitly focused on the issue of climate change and address it directly:

▪ Ex.) Fort Collins CAP: Strongly climate change-oriented, “green” marketing, proud to be taking the lead in climate action

B) On the other end of the spectrum are programs that address climate change from a more indirect or implicit perspective:

▪ Ex.) 4CORE (Four Corners Office of Resource Efficiency): Mission simply to advance resource efficiency; apolitical; composed of individuals, governments, businesses, and utilities companies

#### 2) The type of authority involved

A) Government authority was characteristic of several of the climate action plans, but Aurora’s renewable energy plan was also primarily under government oversight:

▪ Ex.) City of Aurora: Received federal block grant funding; multiple small-scale projects such as residential and commercial rebate programs

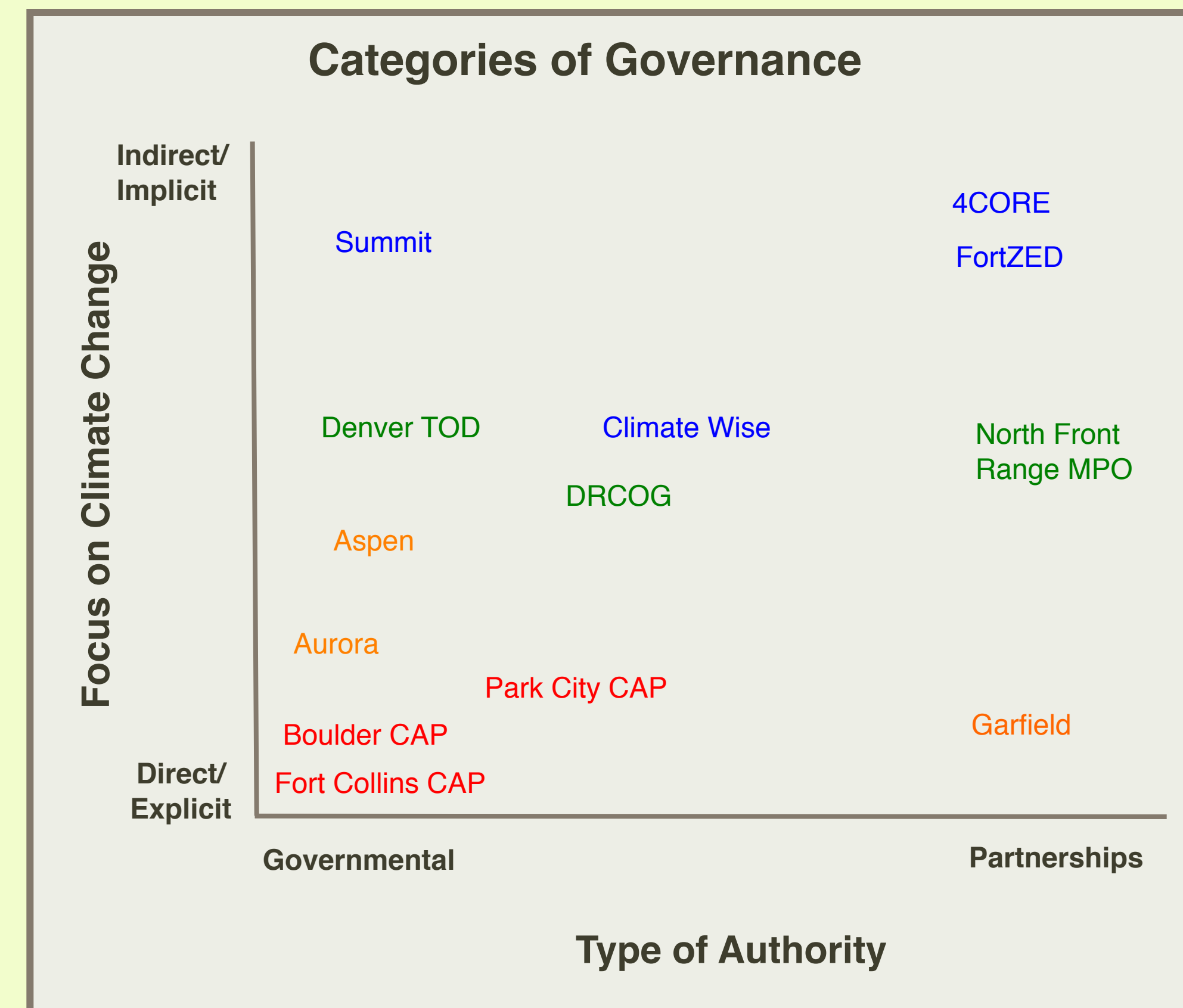
▪ Ex.) Denver Transit-Oriented Development (TOD): A model of governing by authority, i.e. planning and regulation; directly addresses social issues in its long-term regional transportation planning; considers policies that support mixed-income transit-oriented development; stated concern with providing access to affordable transportation for low-income households

B) The other category of authority can broadly be called partnerships, consisting of networks or collaborations between private/commercial businesses, NGOs, government, and other community organizations:

▪ Ex.) Garfield County: Solar array initiated, operated and maintained by a private company (the Clean Energy Collective), not a direct result of government action but approved by the legislature

➤ In general, we notice that:

- CAPs tend to rely on government authority and have a direct focus on responding to climate change while other programs involve a range of strategies depending on local circumstances
- Energy efficiency projects tend to fall on the indirect/implicit side, emphasizing the co-benefits of climate action



### Challenges to Local Climate Action

#### 1) The importance of messaging

- On getting buy-in: it’s important to get the right people at the table to begin with—talk to the key stakeholders, come up with a draft, hold a public/community forum to get feedback, then produce another draft (Lynne Westerfield Greene, High Country Conservation, Summit County)
- Talking to all the possible stakeholders early in the process helps lead to very little resistance later on (Nathan Ratledge, City of Aspen)
- 4CORE avoids any use of the word “climate”; it is nonpartisan, apolitical (Gregg Dubit, 4CORE)
- Park City, UT CAP: Emphasis on community engagement with their “Save Our Snow” campaign

#### 2) Staffing and resources

- Need more dedicated staff and marketing support; being able to distribute information and materials and program branding are important to getting the word out (Wendy Serour, Climate Wise)
- Need more staff to be able to track any reduction of energy use due to building code (Jocelyn Mills, City of Frisco, Summit County)
- Aspen’s model is successful in part because the revenue stream from its [Renewable Energy Mitigation] program allows them to leverage three to four times that amount for investing in renewable energy (Nathan Ratledge, City of Aspen)



## Conclusions

- These findings corroborate some of the broader literature and social science research on urban climate policy and governance in multiple ways:
  - 1) Individual politicians or officials and municipal networks are key players in driving local climate action (Bulkeley 2010)
  - 2) Urban climate governance has been mostly reliant on persuasion and “soft” forms of regulation or self-regulation/self-governing, and governing by enabling (Bulkeley 2010, p248; B&K 2006)
  - 3) Cities emphasize the “win-win” aspect of responding to climate change, in other words, the co-benefits and recognition or leadership image (Bulkeley 2010, p248)
    - There is a large focus on the energy sector, efficiency and renewables, motivated by economic gains; meanwhile, more “politically sensitive areas such as transport and planning” have been overlooked or neglected (B&K 2006, p2253)
  - 4) Perhaps most significantly, the cities currently taking the lead on local climate action are in effect defining “what it means to act in response to climate change,” which has important implications for what other cities choose to do in the future (Bulkeley 2010, p248)

### Future Issues

- Quite problematically, to date there has been insufficient analysis on the impacts of existing policies and measures; more rigorous and quantitative evaluation of the GHG reductions achieved and other consequences of these initiatives is needed (Bulkeley 2010)
- The emphasis on co-benefits validates the market-driven approach to environmental policy, which perpetuates the principle that economic growth need not be compromised when addressing climate change and weakens our capacity to shift toward a bolder paradigm in what is politically achievable in climate legislation (Toly 2008)

## Literature cited

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## For further information

Please contact [jyduang@uchicago.edu](mailto:jyduang@uchicago.edu). More information on the Rocky Mountain Climate Organization and related projects can be obtained at [www.rockymountainclimate.org/index.htm](http://www.rockymountainclimate.org/index.htm).