

## Special Issue

# Citizen Driven Environmental Action

## Guest Editorial

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This special issue of *Transdisciplinary Environmental Studies* focuses on local initiatives that address climate change. Action must be taken right now in order to meet the challenges of global warming. First, new legislation and investments must be made at international and national levels. Second, individuals must change their behaviour and reduce the use of private cars, insulate their homes, and become responsible consumers. Between these two levels, municipalities occupy a key position in addressing climate change, in influencing behaviour and initiating or supporting local environmental initiatives. On the one hand, municipalities are at the forefront when implementing national environmental goals. They enjoy some autonomy in managing energy supplies in their constituencies, and can choose to invest in renewable energies or to improve the efficiency of existing systems. Municipalities are also in a position to influence individual behaviour change through encouraging public transport, providing recycling facilities, energy saving measures, or supporting the insulation of buildings, to name but a few. On the other hand, due to the shorter political distance between citizens and local authorities, it is easier for citizens to engage with and influence municipal environmental policies and therefore make a real difference on the ground. Citizens who take environmental initiatives may also need help from the municipality, for example in the form of financial subsidies, administrative support to fulfil legal obligations, or to facilitate communication with various institutions. Municipalities and citizen thus develop a symbiotic relationship in which each partner constantly needs the other to support their environmental actions.

The nexus between municipalities and citizen constitutes the focus of the Citizen Driven Environmental Action (CIDEA) research project. The overall objectives of CIDEA are: to help reduce Danish citizen's carbon emissions by stimulating behavioural change; to introduce new effective methods and tools for citizen involvement in sustainable development at community level; and to support the efforts of local authorities in becoming more effective actors for sustainable development. The objectives are to be achieved, first, through shedding light on which cognitive and behavioral factors determine citizens' environmental actions and, second, through developing new solutions based on information technologies

which can be used both by local authorities in informing, motivating and activating citizens to change their environmental behaviour, and by citizens who wish to influence municipal environmental policy. The case studies come from pilot projects implemented in seven Danish municipalities: Herning, Kolding, København, Køge, Middelfart, Odense and Skanderborg.

The articles presented in this special issue of TES reflect the objectives of CIDEA. The first paper by Hoff and Strobel on a municipal 'climate revolution' explains why climate change policies in Denmark have been formulated at the level of local governments. It then reviews the different ambitions and scope of environmental policies found among the Danish municipalities. It argues that such differences are explained both by structural factors such as the size of the municipality or the administrative integration of climate policy in other types of policies, and by the role played by the municipal actors in charge of climate policy, which is inspired by grass-roots green organizations and by international climate networks.

The second paper by Scheele compares three Danish web applications, which seek to change people's environmental behaviour, and discusses the different approaches taken and the different combinations of economic and normative incentives they rely upon. As such, these web applications indirectly rely on different institutional approaches to behaviour change.

The third paper by Gausset explores ten pilot projects in four Danish municipalities and discusses how they approach behaviour change. The different projects demonstrate that whether they target individuals or groups, rely on economic or moral incentives, adopt top-down or bottom up leadership, address daily or one-off behaviour change, and how they balance private and collective costs and benefits, impacts in significant ways on the outcomes of these projects.

The fourth paper by Tjørring discusses why El Bolson, a village in Argentina, has become a regional magnet which attracts environmentalists in search of inspiration to adopt a more sustainable lifestyle. Tjørring argues that daily agricultural practices and communal activities are the two corner stones on which the environmentalist community rests: people join the environmentalist community due to their interest for environmental practices and their environmental practices develop because they become part of a larger community and take part in communal activities.

Finally, the fifth article by Berthou argues that even though citizens might have the knowledge, the capacity, and a genuine commitment to adopt pro-environmental behaviour, their actions need to be considered in the context of the complexity of choices made in daily life. Thus, the rationality of behaviour is not to be searched for in knowledge or motivation, but rather in each singular practice that makes sense only at a given time and in a particular context.

While the first three articles describe the wide variety of actors and approaches taken to promote pro-environmental behaviour, the last two articles point towards the limits of the traditional focus on changing knowledge and motivation by using a variety of incentives, and demonstrate the importance and complexity of the context of and social relations in everyday life. Taken together, the five articles presented here provide an indication of the socio-political challenges climate change raises and show that there is still a long way to go before these challenges can be adequately addressed.