

New book outlines how cities organize to achieve sustainability initiatives

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IMPLEMENTING CITY SUSTAINABILITY

Overcoming Administrative Silos to Achieve Functional Collective Action



RACHEL M. KRAUSE AND CHRISTOPHER V. HAWKINS

Credit: University of Kansas

Cities across the United States are implementing sustainability measures as a central part of their work, but some officials have struggled to overcome divisional and bureaucratic boundaries, lack of coordination and collective action dilemmas. A University of Kansas researcher has co-written a book outlining how city governments have successfully implemented functionally broad sustainability efforts.

"Implementing City Sustainability: Overcoming Administrative Silos to Achieve Functional Collective Action" by Rachel Krause, associate professor of public affairs and administration at KU, and Christopher Hawkins of the University of Central Florida, includes results of a nationwide survey of how cities organize and prioritize [sustainability](#) efforts, [case studies](#) of eight cities that have done so successfully and sets forth a theory of functional collective action that outlines four key ways often disparate [city governments](#) have been able to organize [city](#) employees from across departments to achieve common goals.

"At this point, a majority of American cities, at least of population 20,000 and above which we surveyed, have some sort of sustainability-related objective. They don't all necessarily use the label 'sustainability' but have policies that are relevant," Krause said. "Sustainability, by definition, is broad. It encompasses environmental, social and economic well-being. The question we're asking is, "When you have an issue that taps into the responsibility of nearly everyone in an organization, whose responsibility is it, and how do things really get done?"

The authors develop a theory of functional collective action and illustrate four main models that cities use to achieve it: Lead agency consolidation, lead agency coordination, relationships and bargaining,

and decentralized networks. The book then includes cases studies from eight cities as examples of the four models: Fort Collins, Colorado; Kansas City, Missouri; Orlando, Florida; Providence, Rhode Island; Ann Arbor, Michigan; Oakland, California; El Paso, Texas, and Gainesville, Florida.

"These different approaches necessarily bring in different departments and different breadths of people and units involved," Krause said.

"When sustainability is pursued comprehensively, it becomes administratively more complicated, but in this book, we outline ways city governments in the United States are getting this done."

The authors refrain from making recommendations on which model cities should use. What works in one location will not automatically work in another, even if their goals were the same, Krause said. Instead, they focus on developing the theory of functional collective action, its importance and the ways in which successful sustainability implementation is either enabled or inhibited by administrative organization.

"We're taking a theory that has been mainly applied to understand how jurisdictions within a region work together and are applying that to look within individual city organizations," Krause said. "We're making the argument that this theory of functional collective action is broadly applicable to organizations beyond city governments and to issues beyond sustainability. When goals are shared and boundaries are fuzzy, how can successful implementation play out? We've outlined that here."

"Implementing City Sustainability" can be of particular value to scholars interested in institutional and organizational function, high-level students of sustainability and city planning, as well as city governments, employees and city [government](#) professional organizations.

More information: Implementing City Sustainability: Overcoming Administrative Silos to Achieve Functional Collective Action:
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