

ECOPOLITICS PODCAST: Additional Pedagogical Resources (Episode 12)

[Season 1 Episode 12: The Politics of Decarbonization](#)

Overview: Proposing a new metaphor for decarbonization, Dr. Steven Bernstein (University of Toronto) and Dr. Matthew Hoffmann (University of Toronto) discuss how we might challenge carbon lock-in from local action to global governance.

Key Takeaways

- The global commons metaphor posits a “collective action problem” that limits the actions and expectations of high carbon producers, creating an unsolvable problem of free riders and conflicting interests (Dr. Hoffmann: 5:58-7:55).
- Climate change requires collective action to address carbon lock-in, requiring multiple levels of action including action from the individual, collective action by the community, along with regulatory action at the state level.
- The “disruption to carbon lock-in” may occur at multiple levels of governance, creating opportunities for decarbonization to occur locally which may then spread through collective action at the regional, national, and global scales (Dr. Hoffman 21:01-22:32).
- There is a political tension between efforts to enact small technological changes to enable a more sustainable variant of “business as usual” and macro efforts seeking the transformation of society away from carbon lock-in.

Discussion Questions

1. Dr. Hoffman and Dr. Bernstein suggests that metaphors can be both helpful and harmful in facilitating effective collective action on climate change. Has the metaphor of the global commons been helpful in climate governance, or has it hindered it?
2. How does the idea of carbon lock-in create obstacles and opportunities for climate policies at the local, regional, national, and global levels? What are some ways to break free of carbon lock-in?
3. What do you think about the connectedness of individual and collective action, articulated by Dr. Hoffman and Dr. Bernstein? How do your own actions reinforce or disrupt carbon lock-in?

Episode 12: The Politics of Decarbonization

Learn more about our Guests

Dr. Steven Bernstein

- www.utm.utoronto.ca/political-science/distinguished-professor-steven-bernstein

Dr. Matthew Hoffmann

- <https://matthewhoffmann.wordpress.com>
- <https://munkschool.utoronto.ca/profile/hoffmann-matthew/>

Select articles, books and videos

- Hughes, Sara and **Matthew Hoffmann** (2020) “Just urban transitions: Toward a research agenda” *WIREs Climate Change* 11(3)
- **Hoffmann, Matthew J.** 2011. *Climate Governance at the Crossroads: Experimenting with a Global Response after Kyoto* Oxford University Press.
- Millar, Heather, Eve Bourgeois, **Steven Bernstein**, and **Matthew Hoffmann**. “Self-Reinforcing and Self-Undermining Feedbacks in Subnational Climate Policy Implementation.” *Environmental Politics*. 2020.

Projects Dr. Hoffmann and Dr. Bernstein are involved with:

- **Environmental Governance Lab:** <https://munkschool.utoronto.ca/egl/>

Resources and scholars mentioned in this episode:

- **Bernstein, Steven** and **Matthew Hoffmann** (2019) “Climate politics, metaphors and the fractal carbon trap” *Nature Climate Change* 9: 919–925.
- Dalby, Simon. *Anthropocene Geopolitics Globalization, Security, Sustainability* Ottawa, Ontario: University of Ottawa Press, 2020.
- Jaccard, Mark. *The Citizen’s Guide to Climate Success: Overcoming Myths that Hinder Progress*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2020.
- Solnit, Rebecca. *Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities* Third edition. Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books, 2016.
- Unruh, Gregory C. “Understanding Carbon Lock-In.” *Energy Policy*. 28, no. 12 (2000): 817–830.

Learn more about the Global Commons, Carbon Lock-in, and Decarbonization

- Future Earth. The Global Carbon Project. 2020. Web. <https://www.globalcarbonproject.org/carbonbudget/>
- Victor, David G. *Global Warming Gridlock: Creating More Effective Strategies for Protecting the Planet* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Hadden, Jennifer. “Why Are Fossil Fuels So Entrenched?” *Global Environmental Politics*. The MIT Press, 2020.