

**Interpretative Methodologies and Methods Group @ APSA
2020 Hayward R. Alker Student Paper Award**

Citation

Devon Cantwell (PhD candidate, University of Utah)
for “Decision 2030: An Empirical Analysis of City Climate Action Planning and Decision-Making,” presented at the 2019 meeting of the Western Political Science Association in San Diego

Public policy decision-making may be among the subjects of our discipline least often explored through the use of interpretive methods, but Devon Cantwell’s work shows why and how this should change. In “Decision Time 2030: An Empirical Analysis of City Climate Action Planning and Decision-Making,” Cantwell demonstrates how questions of meaning-making and tools of interpretation can help scholars make sense of dynamic practices of agenda setting, negotiation, and policy-making.

Based on content analysis of city climate action planning documents and semi-structured interviews with stakeholders across seven cities in the United States, Cantwell provides a grounded picture of what cities can and cannot do when it comes to addressing climate change. Importantly, Cantwell's argument moves in both directions emphasizing the importance of a city's integration into regional and global networks, while recognizing the limited room to maneuver in the absence of federal coordination and policy incentives. The interviews help to contextualize the particular realities each city has to work within, including the constraints and opportunities set by more and less conservative state legislatures. That constraints may be experienced as self-evident structures is captured well by a city worker in Kansas City, who can declare simply, but in Cantwell’s analysis, sensibly, "We aren't Portland."

Cantwell’s paper leverages data in a variety of ways to answer her central questions on city environmental planning. Her broad curiosity, demonstrated by her creativity with data, is commendable, and allows her to creatively use interpretive methods to ask and arrive at answers to compelling questions about city governance.

Rather than simply adopting interpretive techniques, Cantwell also names and lays these out deliberately, making transparent what were clearly conscious methodological decisions. Fitting in a paper addressing the decision-making process, this also allows readers to identify the modularity in some of Cantwell’s techniques and consider potential extensions to policy-oriented research in different contexts.

Selection Committee

Stacey Philbrick Yadav, Chair (Hobart and William Smith Colleges)
Carolyn Holmes (Mississippi State University)
Christian Sorace (Colorado College)