
Consumer citizens and the Cities for Climate Protection campaign

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Abstract. The Cities for Climate Protection campaign, an effort to lower greenhouse-gas emissions at the city scale, operates within the neoliberal state. Two features characterize the interaction of the state and the public via this campaign: a lack of public involvement, and the construction of the citizen as a passive consumer. The author emphasizes a tension that exists between two readings of the consumer citizen: the pliable figure who listens to neoliberal bottom-line arguments, and the political economic actor who identifies not with consumerism but with political change. Citizens thus cannot be wholly embodied by constructions such as the consumer, and consumerist activism has potential. Citizens, though often interpellated as consumers, can position themselves as reasoning publics who see climate change, their cities, and themselves in relational perspective. The author enlists Foucauldian and deliberative-democracy theory to explore the making of citizens through the Cities for Climate Protection campaign.

Introduction

Scholars of citizenship have noted a neoliberal shift in Western democratic nations whereby citizens are now addressed as 'consumers'. Some have cautioned against relying on this passive subject as the basis of legitimate democratic institutions (Benhabib, 1999; Eisenstein, 1998; Friedmann, 1998; Jenson and Phillips, 1996). Others suggest that a more nuanced reading of the consumer may reveal this subject's progressive political potential (Beck, 1994; Featherstone, 1991; Rose, 1999). In this paper I address the debate over the nature of citizenship in the neoliberal era by using the literatures above to explore the production of citizens via the Cities for Climate Protection (CCP) campaign.

Specifically, I address the question of what sort of subject the campaign produces. I propose that the campaign, emanating from the neoliberal local state, produces a subject, which I will call the consumer citizen, and that this subject has problematic *and* progressive elements. Moreover, I also ask what are the possible political effects of the campaign's consumerist bent combined with its lack of a large involved constituency. I suggest that because of these elements, the campaign may undermine democratic institutions but that its politics do not end there: consumer subjects and others will reshape this subject position and the campaign. In addition, I advocate seeing the partial truth in different visions of the campaign. The paper reveals two perspectives that are both relevant to understanding the campaign. I argue that the pragmatic administrators, who met many difficulties as they tried to protect the climate at the city scale, must be heard when they explain what led them toward the consumer angle and the bottom line. At the same time, their approach cannot be taken at face value: it must also be understood as a consequence of the campaign's relationship to the discourse of neoliberalism and as productive of consumer citizens.

The CCP campaign is a worldwide effort to change urban energy use, and practices of waste-production and transportation that produce greenhouse-gas emissions. The paper

is based on 135 in-person, confidential, interviews I conducted between 1997 and 2000 in Minneapolis, MN, Tucson, AZ, and Seattle, WA, as well as telephone interviews with campaign administrators in twelve other cities involved in the CCP campaign. The analysis is also based on data from local action plans and other campaign materials, in addition to participant observation of meetings in the three cities.

The paper begins with a literature review covering neoliberalism, the state, and the citizen consumer. I examine the campaign by way of Foucault's vision of how power works via discourse to normalize subject positions—in this case, the consumer citizen. I also use Foucault to propose that the state, in order to govern, arranges state–public interaction and responses to climate changes such that they occur within a limited range of possibility. This section ends with a discussion of the positive and negative aspects of consumer citizenship. Then, using my interview data, I reveal the range of troubles met by the city administrator advocates of the campaign which are important to consider in an examination of how the campaign constructs urban citizens. Next, I show how the campaign's regulatory gaze produces passive consumer citizens and normalizes a cost-saving/efficiency approach to climate action. The discussion that concludes the paper confronts the partial truths in the narratives the paper explores. I turn to deliberative democratic theory to comment on the political project of the CCP campaign as an effort to bring about change in a democratic society and, specifically, to address the lack of publics in the CCP campaign. It is possible that the campaign can be criticized for low participation and for addressing citizens as consumers, but it is also true that possibilities for change exist in the consumer citizen and in the CCP campaign itself.

Neoliberalism, the state, and the citizen consumer

My analysis begins conceptually with the discourse of neoliberalism. This discourse shapes how the state and the public spheres interact in the form of the consumer citizen and the reduction of valuable actions to, principally, those that save money. There are two important elements: one is the discourse of neoliberalism and the other is the fact that the campaign is part of the state.

States are political apparatuses deploying regulatory practices (Foucault, 1978). Rather than the imposition of laws, to govern a state means to “arrange things in a certain way” to meet aims (Foucault, 1978, page 95). The modern administrative state is “persistently curious”, seeking to bring the public under its regulatory gaze (Pratt, 1999), following Foucault's (1979) *Discipline and Punish*. The state's tactics, consisting of “education, persuasion, inducement, management, incitement, motivation and encouragement” may compete with each other (Rose and Miller, 1992, page 175 cited by MacKinnon, 2000, page 294) but, importantly, they seek to affect conduct (Rose, 1999). Subjectivities are built through which programs can be implemented (Raco, 2003), and these programs work because of connections “established between the aspirations of the authorities and the activities of individuals and groups” (Rose and Miller, 1992, page 183, cited by Raco, 2003, page 77). ‘Governmentality’, as these competing methods to arrange things is called, works through what becomes taken for granted rather than through force, and “constitutes subjects in ways that make them amenable to government control” (Dryzek, 2000a, page 63; Gordon et al, 1991). Democracy, in this view, is the latest phase of governmentality (Dryzek, 2000a). Others argue that governmentality works by “enabling citizens actively to deploy their freedoms in order to realize the (disparate) goals of the neoliberal state”.⁽¹⁾ Thus grade-school children are taught about the value of energy conservation and bring that wisdom

⁽¹⁾ A comment made by the first referee of this paper.

home, or the state encourages citizens to recycle thereby normalizing the integration of personal environmental responsibility and cost effectiveness (see Darier, 1996).

Foucault wrote that “Discourses are practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (1972, page 49). Discourses are instrument and effect of power, but they may also oppose it (Foucault, 1978, pages 100–102). For Foucault, discourses become taken for granted, but subjects may also consent to their work—thus, what is taken for granted can be changed (Dryzek, 2000a). Foucault was interested in what can be thought, based on the determination of what is truth and who is authorized to speak (Rose, 1999, pages 22–29). He was convinced of the “awesome materiality” of language (Foucault, 1972, page 216).

Specific technologies of power produce discursive practices that enforce social regulation by establishing norms (Ong, 1991). Neoliberalism is a normalizing regime (Ong, 1999); normalization proceeds through the popular belief that neoliberalism is “the only economics in town” (Massey, 2000, page 281). It disciplines state employees as much as citizens. Neoliberalism forces policy debate “to be discussed within the imperatives of the market” (Bloch, 1988, page 3, cited by Harvey, 2000). It is deployed through cost–benefit analyses and other means that aim to maximize efficiency. Neoliberal strategies address themselves to other sources of discourse, such as local government or professionals in the bureaucracy, in order “to limit the forms and possibilities of resistance” (Rose, 1999, page 147). Neoliberalism runs through the state and the public sphere.

Neoliberalism heralds a change in the relationship of the state to citizens (Jenson and Phillips, 1996). The consumer citizen is an outgrowth of classical liberal theory that universalizes the logic of the market for all institutions.⁽²⁾ Neoliberalism changes the character of the public by constructing people as “consumers, profit maximizers and rent seekers” (Dryzek, 2000a, page 76). Citizenship is gained through working and shopping practices (Rose, 1999). Neoliberalism constricts the realm of the possible for personhood (Hacking, 1986) and for society.

The CCP campaign, a state effort, is a means by which the state can direct its regulatory gaze onto the public. Although the state is not the only site of power, it manages debate around climate change by engaging publics through what are now normalized understandings of what is of value—saving money—and of who they are—consumers. Neoliberalism rises through administrators’ practices and their determination of what is possible. The production of truth and the administrators’ authorization to speak is shaped by the understanding that the bottom line is the most likely way to motivate people to act on energy use and thereby lower greenhouse-gas emissions. The subject, consumer citizen, is an outcome of this awesome materiality of language. He or she is constituted by neoliberal discourse. I explore the production of normalized understanding in the section ‘Arranging things’, below.

Dangerous possibilities in consumer citizenship

I now turn to the ways in which consumer identity interacts with citizenship in ways that could undermine or promote democratic society. I cite three arguments: the consumer in relation to ideal citizenship, legitimate government, and progressive politics.

First, passivity, the hallmark of the consumer (Friedmann, 1998, page 29; Gibbs, 2000), is antithetical to what legitimate democracy requires—active, reasoning, publics. Democracy is a “form of organizing our collective life” in which citizens who are moral and political equals deliberate matters that affect all (Benhabib, 2002, page 105). Legitimacy is gained if decisions are open to a process of reasoning or deliberation (Benhabib, 2002, page 105). This process of deliberation is proposed as a better alternative to the

⁽²⁾ S Benhabib, 1997, “Political theory and the public sphere”, class taught at Department of Government, Harvard University, attended by the author.

market democracy of consumers (O'Neill, 2001). Citizenship, properly constituted, embodies an active subject who consents to the institutions of government (Benhabib, 1997). Citizenship is a practice. For instance, Benhabib speaks of an "enlarged mentality" (1997, page 29), that is, the willingness to "think and reason from the standpoint" of others (2002, page 139) as a key component of the ideal citizen. Others frame the ideal in terms of the pursuit of a civil life (rights to work, housing, health) for oneself in association with others (Friedmann, 1998), or "participation in collective purposes" (Prior et al, 1995, page 17) that expands, for example, the meaning of equal rights (Benhabib, 2002). Citizenship involves a process of engagement by which civil society is strengthened by citizens interacting with other publics and the state (Graham and Phillips, 1998).

The second concern is that consumerism as the basis for citizenship poses a danger to legitimate democratic governance. By institutionalizing consumer advocacy (Burgess, 2001; Parker, 1999), the state constricts the scope of governance by catering to the "privatized concerns of our privatized society" (Burgess, 2001, page 114). State legitimacy, rather than being derived from the rule of law and the consent of a reasoning public (Dryzek, 2000b), is conferred on those institutions which "voice the complaints or meet the demands of the consumer" and so their authority is "highly conditional" (Burgess, 2001, page 113). Moreover, policy that considers only the impact of its application on consumers may mean that it does not consider its effect on citizens and on democratic values, practices, and institutions (Sclove, 2000, page 11). Yet the consumer and the citizen are not the same, and democracy "is not just another, ordinary consumer good (like corn chips or underarm deodorant) [nor is it] an arbitrary lifestyle option" (Sclove, 2000, page 11). In addition, one unfortunate implication of the privatization of services, ostensibly to make service provision more accountable to the consumer (Keat et al, 1994, cited by Michael, 1998), is that citizens can hold accountable private enterprise better than they can hold accountable elected governments.

Consumer advocacy is not a sound basis from which to address injustice. Consumer rights of individual protection and choice do not confront exploitation of human and nonhuman life and resource distribution in society as a whole (Sassatelli, 1995, page 2, cited by Burgess, 2001). Consumerism relies on a radical separation between consumers and production, whereby consumers do not have to know where and how things are made (Wilhelmsson, 1998). The aims, then, of environmental protection and consumer interests may be opposed as consumers' interest in the 'right' to cheap, safe, goods lacks the longer term vision required for environmental protection (Wilhelmsson, 1998). Moreover, consumer politics appeals to a "morally minded middle class" which, as a strategy, may mask class relations (Johns and Vural, 2000). Consumerism, beyond individual boycotts, tends to be capricious and so may not lead to a sustained and organized progressive politics (Burgess, 2001; Parker, 1999). Because consumerism is market based, its radical potential is suspect and cannot substitute for government regulation (Parker, 1999).

Redeeming possibilities in consumer citizenship

It is also possible that the consumer citizen has redeeming elements. First, at the very least, consumer politics may serve as an intermediary strategy to alert publics and governments to the need for regulation or oversight (Parker, 1999), or to spur them to immediate action. Graham and Phillips (1998) note that the idea that citizens are consumers of government services has led local government to be more responsive to people. Thus, consumption is a way of communicating with the more powerful (Featherstone, 1991; Urry, 1995) and has made political leadership reevaluate its relationship with the public (Graham and Phillips, 1998).

Second, it is important to situate consumer politics within the constellation of forces in which it has developed, including greater awareness of the relationship between personal and environmental health; mistrust of the way that science, capital, and government seem to work together; and skepticism of the notion that people can make a difference by way of formal political means. This constellation contributes, alongside neoliberalism, to the production of the consumer citizen.

Third, there are many dimensions to the consumer citizen, and ‘consumption’ may represent a different activity by gender, class, race, and ethnicity in different cultures (Michael, 1998). In the USA, personal wellbeing may be at the heart of much consumer action, but it is doubtful that people only think of themselves when they consider the safety of food, water, and other goods: they think of kids, family, and even community.

Fourth, in an even more positive light, some analyses of the politics of ethical consumption (for example, the slow-food movement, family farm support ventures, divestment campaigns, and boycotts of products) posit consumers as a positive political force (Klein, 2000). Rather than being a dupe of commodity fetishism, mesmerized by the corporate image machine, these accounts position consumers as newly informed and conscious of their rights (Berry, 1999, cited by Burgess, 2001), empowered by choice (Michael, 1998), and radical agents of change (Beck, 1994). Consumers are part of a politics of ethical self-formation that encourages individual responsibility for choices (Rose, 1999). Organized consumer politics such as the Stop the Sweatshops Campaign have been, according to Johns and Vural (2000, page 1210), useful as “the most sophisticated effort to eliminate worker abuses in the apparel industry” in recent times, although they cite problems as well. In another example of progressive consumerism, the news media claim that, ‘consumer groups’ have united to challenge the recent US Federal Communications Commission’s decision to expand the degree to which corporate giants can control the types of media in a given area. Green consumerism, moreover, is promoted as a sound means by which to engage destructive capitalist production and consumption processes (Wilhelmsson, 1998). In the USA, politics around the labeling of organic foods and recombinant bovine growth hormone in milk (Bellow, 1999) are good examples of this.

These accounts cite a difference between consumers acting to ‘save a buck’ and consumers like those in the antisweatshopping campaign who care about the relations in goods. Neither a dismissal of consumer politics nor its celebration is warranted. I now move to the case study to show the work of the campaign as a pragmatic response to the challenge of a city-scale climate politics and as productive of consumer citizens.

The CCP campaign: pragmatic responses and the normalization of passive politics

The CCP campaign was launched in 1991 by the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI), a nongovernmental organization (NGO) that works with local governments. The ICLEI has enlisted 403 cities worldwide to claim that climate change is a problem and that cities can do something about it. In the USA 139 cities are part of the effort. The cities range from Los Angeles, CA, and Dade County, FL, to Burlington, VT, and Tucson, AZ. Most US cities commit to a 20% reduction of their 1990 levels of carbon dioxide emissions by the year 2010. To participate, cities must pass a resolution, conduct an emissions inventory, and design a local action plan to address carbon dioxide emissions. Most emissions in cities derive from energy use—particularly from the combined energy use of the industrial and commercial sectors—and transportation via single-occupancy vehicle use.

My research indicates that the process of commitment involves the ICLEI contacting a mid-level bureaucrat and a city council member who take on the responsibility of convincing the mayor and city council to take part in the campaign. Actions such as

installing energy-efficient light bulbs and windows, that can both lower emissions and save money, are most favored by the city administrators and politicians leading the campaign. The emphasis is placed on the savings to be gained and on energy efficiency. The different groups that the campaign addresses with the cost-cutting angle include politicians, businesses, and residents. Administrators work to demonstrate the cost effectiveness of light emitting diode traffic signals and other retrofits in order to get the city council resolution necessary to join the CCP campaign and be added to the map of cities that care about the climate.

Methodology

The three case study cities (Minneapolis, Tucson, and Seattle) were chosen on the basis that they were at different points in the campaign but were representative in that they had all signed on. The interviews I draw on were both written and recorded and are reproduced here verbatim. I spoke with representatives of local NGOs, city bureaucrats, politicians, business leaders, and active citizens. The majority of interviews were conducted within the first three categories. I interviewed heads of city departments and NGOs that would have some connection with climate change, such as environmental, energy, and transportation organizations.

The quotes I use indicate general themes found in the interviews. I have used method (different sources of data) and source triangulation (quotes from different respondents) (Baxter and Eyles, 1997) to strengthen the credibility of my argument. The notion that climate was being or should be 'sold' by addressing the cost-saving benefit of energy efficiency was expressed by approximately 90% of my respondents and was particularly prevalent among those in city government. And it was evident in the emphasis of most local action plans on efficiency and cost. An analysis by the ICLEI corroborated the reliance on energy-efficiency measures as the primary means to achieve reductions (Jessup, 1997). Questions that elicited the responses on cost and energy efficiency included: what means did the city use to promote actions to protect the climate; what was the process whereby the city council and mayor signed on to the campaign; how do you approach global climate change at the city scale; and how will you encourage the residential and business sectors to make changes that will lower emissions; among others.

I explained my concerns about the bottom-line approach to my respondents but many, particularly those in administration, disagreed with me. Even though my respondents' interpretation differs from my analysis, neither is a less trustworthy account. To resolve the discord between my interpretation and that of many of my respondents the following section (Pragmatic acts) is devoted to the difficulties respondents met and that perspective is included in the overall analysis. This satisfies Baxter and Eyles's proposal that the researcher find ways to "ensure that the other's voice is heard alongside that of the researcher" (1997, page 510).

Pragmatic acts: lack of a public and climate trouble

In this section I reveal some of the hurdles to climate action at the city scale faced by very committed administrators. I organized these difficulties into three categories: first, the problem of who is designated to promote the campaign in cities; second, the lack of a process to involve a wider community, despite the claim that city representatives are more available to the public; and third, the difficulty of communicating climate change to the public because of its scientific complexity, uncertainty, and future nature.

First, the mid-level city government administrators enlisted to move the campaign forward do not have the authority to allocate time or money to the initiative. They often do not receive any direction from higher up to pursue calculations to show progress—much less to implement programs. They are overburdened with their own,

preexisting, work. In the case of Minneapolis, the original city councilor was voted out of office and the administrator was moved to a different position in city government after advocating the campaign. The campaign was reintroduced as The Energy Plan (City of Minneapolis, 1996), without any reference to climate change, by savvy employees of the Inspections Department who told me that the savings of energy-efficiency measures would sell the plan to the city council and move the campaign forward. This second group of Minneapolis administrators did not receive directives from the city council or the mayor to pursue these calculations.

Second, when I conducted my interviews, the three case-study cities had very minimally involved the greater public in the campaign. Based on my interview responses, in Tucson only a small group of people in city government and within an NGO hired to write the action plan had heard about the campaign. Minneapolis–St Paul’s original plan (City of Minneapolis and City of Saint Paul, 1993) was put together via meetings among the Center for Environment and Energy (hired to draft the local action plan), the Isaac Walton League, Northern States Power, 3M, Minnegasco, and Honeywell. However, beyond this group, the plan did not extend into other city departments or farther into the business and nonprofit communities. The Northwest Council on Climate Change (NCCC), a nonprofit, brought the issue to the Mayor of Seattle, while Seattle City Light led with an energy-efficiency effort for businesses called Climate Wise, promoted jointly by the ICLEI and the US Environmental Protection Agency. Knowledge of the city’s participation in the CCP campaign was limited to a few people, mostly from Seattle City Light and the NCCC. Many city councilors with whom I spoke were also not aware of the campaign or of its progress in the three case-study cities, nor did members of other city departments know of it. No nonprofit was actively working with the cities on the campaign, with the exception of those hired by Tucson and Minneapolis to write the action plan. The NCCC was trying to educate Seattle’s mayor about climate change, but doing so independently of the campaign. Direct participation of individual citizens was notably absent. When I asked a neighborhood representative if she had heard of the local action plan, she replied:

“I am sure it is kept in a vault some place where nobody knows about it and I am sure that it has good meaning and that there are some great ideas. But I am fairly active in grassroots politics and I don’t know a thing about it ... I am sure it is well meaning. It would be nice if we had more exposure to it” (neighborhood activist, Tucson).

The minimal participation stands in contrast to the claim from those inside or outside city government that climate action in cities is a good idea because the local state is closer to the public. A typical response is as follows:

“I think local government is close enough to people in the community that you can enlist the support of people to do stuff. City government can talk about ride your bike week—we can deal with individuals who can come in to talk about it. The state and national level are too far away. Here people can see that their actions could make a difference” (city administration, Santa Cruz).

My respondents also claimed they were interested in public participation because they saw it as a vital part of the success of the initiative. A respondent from Ann Arbor claimed it is the second most important element of a successful campaign (after having a champion of the cause), and the Santa Cruz respondent argued that community involvement would make residential energy conservation more effective.

Some respondents had good ideas on how to involve the public, and thought that neighborhood buy-in would push elected officials to act. For instance:

“The community is very open to this sort of thing [climate action] but elected officials are not We don’t have a strong environmental attitude Tucson thought it was the right thing to do. But it was not taken further than the environmental subcommittee. That reflects our attitude, and the support maybe. How to reach out? ... We need to get the neighborhoods to buy in. I think a lot of people would make commitments if asked” (politician, Tucson).

Respondents consistently noted education as necessary to further action on climate change in order to get the public to spur political leadership to act, but the quote below reveals that the education process had not yet begun.

“Education. [You need to] educate residents on how important the issue is. They have to say this is important and we want the mayor and council to address this. It’s not on the radar screen yet. If constituents don’t put it on the council’s radar screen, it won’t get there We need a holistic approach—in the schools, city of Tucson, the county, not one agency with 100% of the responsibility I hope kids are talking to their parents” (politician, Tucson).

Portland and Fort Collins were the only cities that had actively sought to involve the greater public, either through informational fora or the drafting of the local action plan. Both noted how difficult it was to talk about climate change and get the public’s attention. Said my Portland contact,

“It’s really hard since it’s the future ... we did a series of forums with the state energy office. We talked about climate change first and all these other benefits We see great value in [the forums] but that’s only because there are enough council members who don’t laugh” (city administration, Portland).

Fort Collins pulled together a citizen committee with representatives from business, technical experts, residents, and nonprofits. The respondent and colleagues had made presentations to the Kiwanas, the Lions Club, and the Chamber of Commerce. They mailed the draft local action plan to over 100 people and sent out 500 invitations to attend an open house to talk about the plan, but not many people came. Graham and Phillips (1998) point out that, although low turnout does not indicate that efforts to involve people have failed, a participatory process is expected at the local level and should involve some degree of public empowerment.

Part of the difficulty in reaching people with respect to the cities’ efforts to abate greenhouse-gas emissions is that there are different publics. My respondents in city government expressed frustration over their lack of knowledge about how to communicate the complexity of climate change to different city residents in order to inspire their interest in personal and community acts to lower emissions. Some felt they had not received adequate support from the ICLEI on how to reach a differentiated public on climate change. Said one administrator:

“If you meet twice a year—that’s not organizing. It assumes that if I get a tidbit of information, get a pat on the back—that’s enough, you’re part of mother earth ... every city is not the same. No one strategy that will work Because of politics, lots of times energy conservation is seen as a whole, middle class issue. We have a large African American population and there is no organizing around this issue. If there is no organizing from below, why would anything happen? The CCP campaign is just an effort from one or two people inside government. This is not how it usually gets done You can only do instrumental things if you’re trying to change from just within city government” (city administration, Atlanta).

Many respondents emphasized that people respond to different reasons, so flexibility should be applied in the effort to reach the public on climate change.

Not only is the identity of various publics a consideration, but the geography is as well. In Boulder, discussing the risk of sea-level rise, for instance, will not induce people to act.

“It’s just really hard for people to get their arms around what it means—sea level rise doesn’t impact us. So you have to give them something to focus on that matters to them. We need to figure out different things because it won’t be the same everywhere. ICLEI needs different outreach tools. We need to tie actions to bigger global impacts. We need to keep [climate change] in the background and have things to measure” (city administration, Boulder).

I turn now to the third difficulty: scientific complexity, uncertainty, and temporal distance. City administrators were stymied in their efforts to reach the public by media portrayals of climate change as ‘scientifically uncertain’. When I conducted my interviews in late 1997 and early 1998, respondents noted public disbelief and a media campaign by the conservative Global Climate Coalition militating against local climate action. Some told me that it was more possible to talk about climate in 1997–2000 than in 1991 when the first cities signed on. When I finished the interviews in 2000, the reality of climate change was more accepted, but it was still not a burning issue, as the Portland respondent points out below. General public apathy about many issues that are closer to home than climate change has been acknowledged (Bloomfield et al, 2001; Graham and Phillips, 1998).

“... Most of the bureau heads know it exists and half care about it since they see it is related to sustainability. That’s a big difference from 1993—then it was just an energy thing. Then they saw it in the popular press so they knew it was a problem In the past we had the CO₂ reduction strategy as the name, but if it wouldn’t work, we’d focus on transportation, air quality, and energy Enough people on the street know what global warming is—six years ago it seemed too loony. Now people think it’s real, but they don’t care” (city administration, Portland).

Most action plans begin with the grave scientific facts of global warming: how it is happening, what causes it, and what it will do. The emphasis on facts proved dangerous when some administrators were stung in public fora by their own lack of scientific knowledge. A Fort Collins administrator had prepared a presentation for the local Chamber of Commerce, but could not answer the questions its members drew from a *Scientific American* article. This respondent and others cited scientific complexity as a reason to approach climate change from the angle of energy savings, asthma rates, and water pollution associated with the proximate causes of climate change (single-occupancy vehicle transportation, energy production, and consumption).

“From what I’ve experienced, I have to go with other problems like air quality or focus on local benefits We haven’t really focused on [climate change]. Lots of people think it’s being too dramatic and pessimistic and crying wolf At CCP meetings the question of whether to delve into the issue of climate change was discussed. We heard [from ICLEI] that it is best to focus on benefits. I now think it would have been better when we first went to the Chamber of Commerce to tell them what we were doing” (city administration, Fort Collins).

Administrators also have to respond to the public’s perception that the ills of climate change and the benefits from changes to confront it will affect only the lives of future generations, not theirs. According to the respondent below, energy efficiency is one of “many buttons” that may make climate change more immediately relevant to people.

“For most people, if you say global warming, they think first of all it’s somewhere else, it’s off in the future. If you can bring the issue closer to home, in terms of energy efficiency ... basically I think climate change is a metaphor for changes we

ought to be making anyway. Energy efficiency is good for a lot of reasons besides the fact that it reduces CO₂ emissions Some people will relate to the global environmental crisis [on the basis] of personal eco guilt or [some will relate to] economic opportunities ... or maybe there are many buttons to push—whatever works to get people connected” (NGO/educator, Seattle).

What they cannot discuss are unimaginable changes to personal lifestyle.

“Talking about lifestyle and consumption limits—who can you can talk to? The fear people have is that the choice is between an abysmal lifestyle where they never get to drive a car and what they have now. Incremental change is the best. [Energy] efficiency is key. Otherwise we’re going to burn up the planet” (NGO, Minneapolis).

In sum, it is important to know the significant difficulties which the campaign’s advocates face because their words provide a partial explanation for the practice of the campaign. Administrators know that capital interests are an obstacle, the media are unhelpful, and the science is difficult. Many feel at a loss as to how to bring the message home. When they do discuss the campaign, it is without reference to climate and ‘regrets’ policies and with reference to local benefits and multiple buttons to push based on their understanding of what works. The campaign is placed in the hands of a few people with little authority to make changes. Minimal knowledge of the campaign exists within and outside city government. Only slight effort has been made to involve the public despite the invocation of a democratic closeness of the local state to the urban public.

The difficulties discussed above are the context for what I discuss next: administrator’s decisions to sell climate protection through energy efficiency and the construction of the public as energy or appliance consumers. Administrators portray the shift from climate to dollar savings via energy efficiency as pragmatic. And they are right: city councils and mayors do not want to bear the responsibility for costs accrued in the interests of protecting the climate when there are so many other budget priorities. As home energy consumption rises (Dortch, 1997), efficiency may be a step in the right direction. However, a complex debate persists over the possibility that efficiency and conservation programs lead to *increased* energy consumption (see, for instance, Greening and Greene, 1998; Grubb, 1992; Inhaber, 1997; Joskow and Marron, 1992; Lovins, 1996; Wackernagel and Rees, 1997). This debate is beyond the scope in this paper, but I note it as evidence that there are both technical and philosophical reasons against the bottom-line/efficiency approach. The issue, according to the primary CCP campaign consultant, is “how to achieve an environmentally sustainable economy versus a fossil fuel economy—it’s not just about getting the low hanging fruit ... you’re not going to change a few light bulbs and get through this”.⁽³⁾

Even though administrators’ decisions may be pragmatic and appear to be reasonable, their actions are part of larger discourses about how things are valued, what is possible, and what citizens’ roles are in a democratic polity. Emphasizing local benefits and multiple buttons could be seen as a creative and/or pragmatic response, but it also amounts to a neoliberal buffet of options that do not address values nor necessarily lend themselves to structural change. Although it is important to hear these day-to-day, practical, difficulties, the responses (education, local benefits, energy efficiency) may also be understood as part of the body of tactics operating through the state that shape consumer citizens.

⁽³⁾ From notes taken at a presentation by R Torrie (of Torrie Smith Associates Inc.) at “The Heat is On”, a conference convened by the City of Minneapolis and the City of St. Paul, MN, November 1999.

‘Arranging things’—normalizing the consumer citizen

The state “arrange[s] things in a certain way” (Foucault, 1978, page 95) to meet aims in a manner that makes the state’s actions appear normal. The normalizing gaze of the CCP campaign transforms very different citizens into consumers for whom anything that will save them money will appeal. The following quote sweeps three different groups—the “city council, business and economically depressed people”—into one that, uniformly, will respond most readily to saving money.

“We have not tried to reach people on climate change. We have used it in some literature but climate change won’t make the city council, business and economically depressed people do anything. It is not a personal, day-to-day issue. What is, is reducing energy [use] and saving money” (city administration, San Diego).

Voicing the neoliberal mantra, another respondent told me, “cost-effective that’s the word, that’s the buzzword now” (business, Seattle). A city administrator noted that “long-term global warming is not going to be a selling point; it boils down to dollars” (city administration, Overland Park, KS). An administrator remarked:

“People can get their arms around [energy efficiency]. We can talk to facilities folks about savings and to department heads. They can’t spend more out of their budgets. It’s a very pragmatic approach. It has to be that way. In most municipalities it’s that way” (city administration, Boulder).

In interviews with city administrators, I was consistently met with the concealment of climate behind money-saving methods and the ‘it has to be that way’ syndrome. This is the way that truth and the boundaries of what can be thought are formed. It is the process whereby a discourse about efficiency and cost saving becomes taken for granted, and the forms and possibilities of resistance are limited.

“... but like other large issues, I mean, most large issues, if it doesn’t hit people in the pocket book, then you can’t do much. How do you make a global issue a local issue—that’s what you’re asking me. You have to attach it to energy savings. By doing these things you are also helping the environment” (city administration, Atlanta).

I asked one respondent, ‘What are the pros and cons of focusing on cost saving or energy efficiency as opposed to climate change?’ Quite evident in his answer is the difficulty, discussed in the previous section, of making incontrovertible statements about climate change—even in 2000 when the interview occurred. Also visible at the end of the quote is the strength of the neoliberal discourse revealed in the path the administrator imagines out of the controversy around the existence and effects of climate change:

“For energy efficiency, there is no pro and con; it is strictly pro Am I willing to give up convenience and comfort for the sake of emissions reduction? I should be concerned, but it won’t happen tomorrow. I know it doesn’t make sense, but I can afford to be inefficient. If you talk about climate change, this is a moot question. It is argued both ways even in our community. The skeptics say climate change is a natural thing. It’s day to day, one to three degree changes—what does that mean to me? This won’t be a selling point. Some say the earth has great adaptive ability so there will be no significant impact on people. The aspect of climate change that will impact people is smog in cities. It has an impact on health. It might be a selling point to convince people that emission reductions is good for your health, but how many people are going to react to that? In the long term, global warming is not going to be a selling point. It boils down to dollars. You can live a better quality of life and make contributions to minimize global warming but in the end Energy efficiency results in dollars, reducing light use results in dollars. This reduces emissions, but you get dollars too. Money talks” (city administration, Overland Park, KS).

Similarly, one councilwoman told me she got on Tucson City Council's environmental subcommittee because of environmental problems she saw. The means she advocated to affect those problems—cost-saving retrofits—is illuminating:

“I thought it was a grim situation ... you know, in terms of the environment, because here, electricity is generated by coal burning plants And that's how we would use lighting retrofits and all these things—you'll end up saving money on your electric bill. So, you know, everybody wins in this situation ... we've always looked at it for not only the environment but for the taxpayer type of thing” (politician, Tucson).

The normalization of this discourse is evident in the reliance on universals—universal means of valuing the environment, universal (undifferentiated) citizen with universal cost-saving concerns—and options couched in the language of ‘it has to be that way’. As the director of an NGO notes below, the strategy avoids dealing with hard questions and tough choices, but the economic reasons are universally agreeable and so serve as a strategic means to get beyond the science. Subjects, as Foucault suggested, may consent to the work of taken-for-granted discourses.

“[Climate change] is still an ‘in the closet’ kind of thing. No one wants to admit that it is there, but they are willing to talk about so called no regrets kind of strategies. ‘Let's do the things that make sense to deal with for economic reasons anyway, we can agree to disagree on the state of science and still do these things” (NGO, Minneapolis).

To summarize, the CCP campaign plays into the hand of the neoliberal faith in the market as the determinant of value and the wellspring of solutions. The danger of the bottom-line approach is that a decision made on the basis of cost stops the discussion by bracketing values, judgment, and responsibility. This approach limits the basis of democratic decisionmaking to cost, construed narrowly in monetary terms. In this manner, the principle of protecting the climate is reduced to a commodity (Dryzek, 1997).

The campaign, further, does not simply fail to include: it actively forms citizens as consumers. Rather than the ideal of a participatory, deliberative, process in which the power in citizens' differences is confronted and people are encouraged to engage in reasoned discussion about rising greenhouse-gas emissions, the campaign addresses a homogeneous consumer public and normalizes one approach. Failure to involve the public and the formation of citizens as consumers are thus intertwined processes. Urban citizens are most ‘present’ in this process as consumers of gas, electricity, and better appliances. The reasoning publics that might expand the basis of city action on climate change to something beyond saving money are not invited. Intent on avoiding the active citizen and discouraging publics with the power and get answers to difficult questions, the CCP campaign pursues a passive politics designed to teach citizens about more energy-efficient light bulbs.

Urban publics, then, are consumers whom CCP administrators think will purchase energy-efficient light bulbs on the basis of information, passed down through education, as I discussed in the previous section. The respondent below suggests that people do not act on the basis of information in the case of climate change. He also highlights the positive face of the consumer citizen who wants ‘things to do’ that protect the climate. Finally, he advocates the idea that “the norm can change” that underscores an argument of this paper.

“I don't think people base what they do on information. They base it on tradition and training. And, what the norm is. And the norm can change and tradition can change and training can change. I think people want technology in the larger sense of the word Tools and things to do. They want home tours that show homes that do things differently. They want to go to the car shows that show the different cars. They want the free bus ride” (NGO, Tucson).

The consumer citizen may work in ways that do not suggest a neoliberal norm. The possibility of changing normalized understandings is the subject to which I now turn in the discussion.

Discussion

I began by asking, what sort of subject does the CCP campaign produce and what are the possible political effects of the campaign's consumerist bent combined with its lack of a large involved constituency. I have presented two versions of the work of the CCP campaign relative to urban citizens: one version sees neoliberalism arranging a passive public, failing to encourage participation, and constricting possibility; the other recognizes potential in the campaign and the consumer. I begin with the first of those, supported by the critiques in which neoliberalism and the consumer citizen pose a threat to democracy and the evidence presented in the sections titled 'Pragmatic acts' and 'Arranging things'. I then move to the idea of possibility embodied in the consumer citizen and the campaign itself presented under 'redeeming possibilities', which suggest that this subject derives from a greater awareness and may be part of progressive politics. However, I add to this notion by using feminist and deliberative democratic theory about subjects and the relationship of the state and public sphere.

Managing democratic participation

The CCP campaign operates within the neoliberal state. As a product of neoliberalism, the campaign serves to regulate the interaction of the state and citizens by constructing the public as passive energy consumers—rather than as active citizens. It is possible that the state may be better able to manage democratic participation by encouraging the politics of consumer-oriented change—that is, individual lifestyle modification through purchases. There is perhaps some attraction in the constructed unity of this identity whereby everyone wants to save money. Democratic citizenship requires an active subject who could be, for instance, a consumer activist challenging the political economy of the production of greenhouse-gas emissions. But the consumerist focus on the right of individuals to purchase energy-efficient appliances is not enough to further the ideal of active involvement in democratic life. From this perspective, the CCP campaign supports neoliberal market democracy and does not encourage active citizenship.

My respondents made rhetorical claims about the democratic potential of the CCP campaign. They pointed to the proximity of city council legislators to urban citizens to claim that the city was an ideal place to pursue a campaign to protect the climate. They reflect a recognition that greenhouse-gas emissions are very much a part of local life. Their perceptions are reflected in the literature. "Local governments have played long-standing roles in the institutionalization of public participation and in the development of innovative ways to engage citizens in policy-making" in part because the "politics of local government is also the politics of everyday life" (Graham and Phillips, 1998, pages 1 and 5). Despite the recognition of the closer relationship of local government with citizens, the campaign has a very small public.

My critique of the minimal CCP public is also based on the ideals of meaningful popular participation and active citizenship in which reasoning publics interact with each other and the state to shape just decisions. Meaningful participation in a state-led effort is constituted by the acknowledgement of different, reasoning, publics; respect for the right to know; the development of a process that strengthens disenfranchised civil society groups; and a degree of responsiveness by the state. Graham and Phillips indicate that public participation is seen by local government and citizens alike as an integral part of governance that implies reciprocal obligation

(1998, page 13). Dryzek (2000b) argues further that even though the participation of all in collective decisionmaking is not possible, reasoned deliberation of *some* is necessary for a legitimate outcome.

Though participation is not a panacea for the difficulties of decisionmaking, it has great potential. It is true that participatory measures may ignore difference and serve as a means to include some and exclude others; to pacify by making people think that their views are being heard (Fraser, 1997); and may end up being an expensive, time-consuming, and boring event with unspectacular results (Dryzek, 2000a; see also Bloomfield et al, 2001; Graham and Phillips, 1998; Keller and Pofert, 2000, on how to evaluate deliberative participation). Acknowledging liberal democratic realities, Gramscian possibilities, and the fact that “all forms of political life fall short of a perpetual carnival” (Dryzek, 2000a, page 73), the ideal of a participatory process of engagement by active publics remains critical to democratic life. Fundamentally, if participation, as a democratic institution, confronts the key difficulty of inclusion and exclusion, it “represents the potential [for people] to alter their own conditions of existence by means of rational–critical discourse” (Calhoun, 1995, page 248). Participation, ideally, should not only allow for the expression of legitimate views (Spash, 2001), resolve disputes, and plan actions, but also alter identities (Calhoun, 1995). The cities, having not engaged the public, do not yet come close to the ideal.

Through the normalization of the citizen as consumer and the lack of public engagement, this state-sponsored campaign could at worst contribute to the erosion of the public sphere and undermine democratic practice. At best the bottom-line emphasis allows society to value the environment by monetary cost alone and to focus on the ‘low hanging fruit’ of energy efficiency rather than making changes, for instance, to the fossil-fuel economy, that would more significantly affect greenhouse-gas emissions. These are the dangers that obtain in the work of the CCP campaign.

Possibilities: refiguring consumer identity and the public sphere

The dark vision of a passive citizen, an eroded public sphere, and a managing neoliberal state that I have just proposed has distinct cracks in its hegemonic proportions. The first element that upsets this negative view is the idea that subjects are able to refigure the discourses that constitute them. Fraser (1997) argues that subjectivity may be culturally constructed, but it has critical or reflective (Dryzek, 2000a) capacities as well. Consumer citizens could act progressively: they could refigure how this subject position is understood and in what type of politics they act. Neoliberalism, working through the state, may promote a passive consumer identity, but an identity “remains the property of the claimant, a creation of collective action” (Jenson and Phillips, 1996, page 115). Even though the subject is the product of the neoliberal discourse, among others, it is capable of resignification. This is “power’s own possibility of being reworked” (Butler, 1993, cited by Fraser, 1997, page 214).

It may be that today people are hailed by capital and the media more often as deodorant consumers than as politically aware subjects. However, interpellating citizens as consumers of deodorant is different from citizens who, as consumers, refuse to buy Shell gasoline. In the first case, the citizen so addressed turns and recognizes herself in the discourse of consumerism; in the second, he misrecognizes himself as an activist and asks those addressing him to justify their practices (Haraway, 1997, page 50). Some publics will use their consumer identity strategically (for example, to organize in favor of apparel workers or locally owned media) as part of a relational analysis of the world. Further, it may be the case that people deploy the subject position of the consumer in ways that fit their own legitimate needs. Consumers acting for the well-being of a collectivity on the basis of a relational analysis of the context and an ‘enlarged

mentality' are capable of actively shaping a progressive politics. Thus, the consumer may not be such a threat to ideal citizenship as some think.

My second proposal for hope in the subject of the consumer and the politics of the CCP campaign is the interaction of the public sphere and the state. The public sphere is a place for discussion among citizens about any matter (Fraser, 1997; Habermas, 1962). It is where the work of articulating, contesting, and resolving normative discourses takes place (Benhabib, 2002, page 115). The public sphere is a vehicle of democratic self-government and an arena of publics, not the sphere of a single public (Calhoun, 1995). In the ideal public sphere, many publics, not just the consumer public, interact in opinion making and decisionmaking (Fraser, 1997).

An autonomous public sphere constantly confronting the state is perceived by some as necessary to avoid the constraint the state would put on discursive contestation (Dryzek, 1994; 2000a). The state attempts to institutionalize protest so that arguments based on 'fact' can take place (Parker, 1999; Turner, 2001). The state, in this view, is compromised and needs radical movements to keep it accountable and to bring new ideas to the fore (Dryzek, 2000a). The ability of the state to 'arrange things' and the productive capacity of power seen in administrator's neoliberal arguments and in the form of the consumer citizen suggest that Dryzek's call for vigilance is important. But the idea of vigilance, accountability, and legitimacy is possible because, contrary to the strong Foucauldian argument, hegemonic discourses like neoliberalism do not completely constitute *both* the supporting and the competing views (Dryzek, 2000a; see also Fraser, 1989).

Others claim that the idea of a separate state and public sphere rests on a faulty model because these boundaries are permeable⁽⁴⁾ (Abu-Lughod, 1998; Rose, 1999). Indeed, a public sphere that requires a sharp separation between state and civil society will not, in this age of "inescapable global interdependence manifest in the international division of labor within a single, shared planetary biosphere", be up to the task of "imagining the forms of self-management, interpublic coordination and political accountability that are essential to a democratic and egalitarian society" (Fraser, 1997, pages 91–92).

The public sphere is also the site of capacity to change the terms of political discourse and thereby affect the state (Calhoun, 1995; Dryzek, 2000a; Fraser, 1997). This capacity exists in the variety of publics (subaltern counterpublics, consumers, mainstream environmentalists, and so on) who expand the discursive space of the public sphere (Fraser, 1997). The public sphere, like the state, is home to competing discourses like cost-efficiency, environmental justice, and green radicalism (Dryzek, 2000a). Its publics interact with state actors and their campaigns and with discourses like neoliberalism, rather than being engulfed by them. Further, the capacity of the public sphere lies in "the communicative power that the public sphere can exert over the state, [which] is diffuse and pervasive, felt in the way terms are defined and issues are framed, not in the direct leverage of one actor over another" (Dryzek, 2000a, page 101). Dialogue in the public sphere may lead to greater awareness, a broader discussion, and collective action understood as the creation of new laws (Benhabib, 2002). Subaltern or competing discourses influence public policy and, even without direct action in the state, can have social and material effects (Dryzek, 2000a). Given this view of the political relationship between the state and public sphere, it is probable that other discourses and efforts, outside the campaign and within the public sphere, will meet the state's climate effort and positively change both in the process. If evidence from consumer activist campaigns mentioned in the literature review is any indication, other

⁽⁴⁾ Benhabib's class; see footnote (2).

citizen subject positions will step forward to confront the normalization of bottom-line consumer citizenship. These aspects of the public sphere may resolve the concern that consumerism will undermine legitimate institutions.

The final element that shakes the first, pessimistic, account is the contextual aspect of actually existing practice in the campaign already discussed under ‘pragmatic acts’. To reiterate, it must be recognized that, in proposing climate action, city administrators are faced with a morass of citizen apathy about the issue; institutional and political economic obstacles; national inaction; confusion over the science; and powerful opponents at all political scales. Although their responses to these troubles can be understood as part of the neoliberal state arranging things to meet its aims, it is also important to see them as the best these administrators felt they could do and as a strategic approach. Further, to be fair, processes were begun—the group collected in Minneapolis–St Paul, the plan circulated in Fort Collins, the meetings held in Portland—but they “hit a wall” (politician, Tucson). And from that wall emerged energy efficiency, the cost ‘buzzword’, and the consumer citizen.

Bridging effects: concluding thoughts

Participation is not an event with a beginning and an end. It is, like the campaign, a process that resonates throughout society, rather than follows, in linear fashion, the steps of the campaign itself. The power of the public sphere is through the defining of issues and the broadening of awareness. As my respondents pointed out, the process of city climate action continues.

“I think another thing is the bridging effect of all of this [climate action] ... I think that is implicated in any kind of activity that you do, if you look at it singularly it does not add up to much, but if it is a bridge to a broader awareness, there is a real value to that” (city administration, Minneapolis).

The process also proceeds via other organizations linked to the campaign through people or issues. Recognizing that the Tucson City Council had yet to take up the local action plan a year after its writing, this respondent said:

“... there’s been a lot of collaborative efforts that have come out of it all [various climate/environment efforts] which I think lead to further stages, and so I don’t feel anything is every lost” (politician, Tucson).

For instance, the Tucson Coalition for Solar wrote the city’s local action plan. This coalition is part of the Metropolitan Energy Commission, on which city government representatives sit as well as a representative from each of Livable Tucson, the Tucson Unified School District, and the unique solar community, Civano. Their friends include Women for Sustainable Technology; the ad hoc ‘alliance of the cool clean’, Tucson Solar Coalition (a second grassroots solar group); and a group of activists called the ‘Dudettes’ who come from Tucson Water, Tucson Electric Power, Trees for Tucson, and Planner’s Ink. These groups are working on aspects of climate change, if not the campaign itself. They do not wait for the state to call them (as consumers of energy-efficient goods or even participants in the campaign), but they interact with it through their own work. These groups will bring other ideas into dialogue and form other discourses that will, in their ‘awesome materiality’, affect cities, publics, and emissions.

Fraser’s call for interpublic coordination that recognizes this shared planetary biosphere is partly fulfilled by the campaign in the obvious commitment of the administrators and other concerned respondents, the bold decision to take on climate change (of all issues) at the city scale, and the mixing of networks in and outside the state discussed above. My respondents spoke of themselves, people in general, and their cities as knowing the right thing to do, of being part of a world community, or as caring about locally specific environmental effects. In addition, evidence exists, for

instance in the example of Tucson above, that the campaign extends into and meets up with various activist publics who do not identify others or themselves solely as consumers and who will not use the bottom-line message to appeal to citizens. These respondents point to the beginnings of a ‘sense out there’ of which the CCP campaign is, discursively, a part.

“I think one thing that is really important is a sense of world vision, which I think people are beginning to get ... This is an issue that needs to be worked out in the long run” (politician, Seattle).

The campaign, further, has helped to engage city government with sustainability in San Diego, and contributes in Santa Cruz to city efforts in favor of solar power. Just as the CCP campaign is part of the bottom-line/efficiency discourse it also feeds into others.

“ICLEI is responsible for starting an entire program—the sustainability program, we have council policy on sustainability and training. It has generated an opportunity to use the language; it’s started a movement” (city administration, San Diego).

“[Concerning solar power], with the residential sector, because of the ethic, people do things because it’s the right thing to do ... Having the CCP campaign and related programs [Million Solar Roofs] is more likely to broaden the waves of support” (city administration, Santa Cruz).

The CCP campaign does produce a consumer citizen and has not engaged many publics in the effort. Neither aspect enhances the strength of democratic institutions, but neither element serves definitively to condemn the campaign. The neoliberal discourse of consumer citizenship and bottom-line politics is one of several circulating through the state and public sphere. The state and public sphere are home to citizens who are concerned about the relationship of everyday life in cities to climate change. These publics are connected in networks that have the potential to reshape how climate action proceeds. Citizens can rewrite the passive consumer script by asserting themselves as activist consumers who bike to work rather than buying more gasoline. No one is ever *just* a consumer, no matter how often capital and the state hail people in this manner. Subjects can misrecognize themselves in the consumerist discourse, and political efforts may employ consumer-oriented strategies as part of their effort—but not as a complete strategy. The communicative power of the public sphere can change the state and the norm. Multiple publics bring different discourses to the fore through avenues other than the campaign that will interact with it, potentially changing the terms of political discourse in the process. Despite the neoliberal emphasis of the campaign, networks of publics and state administrators will advocate protecting the climate for other, more sound, reasons.

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