P101 / Climate Change and the Transformation of Multi-level Governance: Recentralization, Decentralization and Territorial Policy Implementation

Topic : Multilevel Governance and Local Policy

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GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Climate change is increasingly transforming the priorities, instruments and institutional arrangements through which public policies are designed and implemented (Ostrom 2012). Although climate change is a global challenge, its consequences and many of the measures required to address them are profoundly territorial (Fuhr and al. 2018; Haupt and al. 2022). Adaptation, land-use planning, housing, mobility, energy, agriculture, biodiversity and the management of natural resources all depend heavily on regional and local governments (Pailler and al. 2026). At the same time, national governments and international institutions have strengthened climate targets, regulatory frameworks, strategic planning and monitoring mechanisms. Climate change therefore raises a fundamental question about the contemporary organisation of the state: does the growing importance of climate policy lead to recentralization, decentralization, or a transformation of multi-level governance?

This panel examines in which way and how much climate change is reshaping the distribution of authority, resources, responsibilities and policy capacity between levels of government (Benz 2024; Jon and Peters 2020; Marks and al. 1996). It starts from the observation that climate governance cannot be understood simply through the traditional opposition between centralization and decentralization (Cole and al. 2015). Climate policies may simultaneously strengthen central steering while increasing the responsibilities of territorial governments. National governments may establish targets, standards and funding mechanisms, while regions, cities and other territorial actors are expected to translate these objectives into locally appropriate strategies. This can produce new forms of interdependence rather than a straightforward transfer of power (Pasquier, Simoulin and Weisbein 2025).

In a way, climate change leads us to operate the same intellectual turn that did occur in European Studies thirty years ago. Whereas Europeanization was perceived as either an erosion of the Nation-State or to the contrary a rescue of it, approaches in terms of governance led to other ways of thinking. The same question is now set inside Nations States about relations between central authorities and local and regional ones. The panel consequently focuses on the relationship between climate policy, multi-level governance and territorial policy implementation. It asks under which institutional, political and territorial conditions climate change generates different configurations of authority and coordination (Bouckaert and al. 2010; Pressman, 1984; Trein and al. 2019). Particular attention will be paid to the distinction between formal competences and effective policy capacity: who formally decides may not be the same as who possesses the knowledge, resources and organizational capacities required to implement climate policies.

The panel also invites contributions examining whether climate change constitutes a new phase in the transformation of the State (Pierson, 2000). Does the increasing strategic importance of climate policy reinforce national planning and coordination? Does it strengthen the autonomy and policy capacity of regional and local governments? Or does it generate hybrid governance arrangements in which national governments retain strategic control while territorial actors become increasingly important for implementation, adaptation and policy experimentation?

Comparative research across countries, regions, cities or policy sectors is particularly welcome, as are studies of different State traditions and territorial governance arrangements.

The panel aims to contribute to debates on multi-level governance, decentralization, policy implementation and state transformation by treating climate change not only as a policy challenge but also as a potential driver of institutional and territorial reconfiguration.

The panel welcomes contributions addressing questions including:

- Does the growing importance of climate policy lead to recentralization or territorialisation of public action?

- How are authority, resources and responsibilities redistributed between national, regional and local governments?
- Under which conditions does climate governance strengthen territorial policy capacity?
- How do national climate strategies interact with local and regional priorities?
- Does decentralisation improve the capacity to implement climate policies, or does it generate coordination problems?
- How do different state traditions and territorial governance arrangements shape climate policy implementation?
- Can national steering and territorial autonomy coexist, and under which institutional conditions?
- Are climate policies producing durable transformations in multi-level governance?

CALL FOR PAPERS

Climate change presents a distinctive challenge to contemporary systems of governance. Its causes and consequences operate across various scales, while many of the policies required to address it are implemented through territorial governments and institutions. At the same time, climate change has become a major national policy priority, encouraging governments to strengthen strategic planning, regulation, coordination and monitoring.

This creates a fundamental puzzle for the study of multi-level governance: does the growing centrality of climate policy strengthen the central state, empower territorial governments, or produce new forms of intergovernmental governance?

This panel invites contributions examining how climate change is transforming relationships between national, regional and local levels of government. We are particularly interested in the tension between central steering and territorial implementation. National governments may retain control over strategic objectives, regulatory frameworks and financial instruments while increasingly relying on territorial governments to translate climate objectives into concrete policies. Conversely, territorial governments may acquire new responsibilities without necessarily receiving equivalent resources, competences or autonomy.

The panel therefore welcomes papers addressing questions such as:

Does climate change generate recentralization or decentralization?
How are climate policies territorialised?
What role do regional and local governments play in climate policy implementation?
How do territorial capacities affect climate policy outcomes?
How do state traditions shape the organizsation of climate governance?
Whichat forms of intergovernmental coordination emerge around climate policy?
Do climate policies create new forms of territorial cooperation and experimentation?
Are transformations in climate governance temporary institutional adjustments or evidence of a longer-term transformation of the state?

We particularly encourage comparative and theoretically informed contributions examining different countries, territorial systems and policy sectors. Papers may address climate mitigation or adaptation, energy transition, biodiversity, land-use planning, housing, mobility, agriculture or other areas where climate objectives intersect with territorial governance.

The panel seeks to move beyond the conventional opposition between centralization and decentralization. It proposes to examine hybrid and differentiated forms of multi-level governance, in which authority, resources and implementation capacities may be distributed unevenly across levels of government.

Ultimately, the panel asks whether climate change is simply generating new public policies within existing institutional structures, or whether it is contributing to a deeper reconfiguration of the territorial state and the way public action is governed across levels.