P192 / Subnational Climate Governance Under Pressure: Shifting Coordination, State Capacity and Institutional arrangements

Topic : Multilevel Governance and Local Policy

Chair : Alvaro Artigas (Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris (Sciences Po))

Second Chair : Eduardo Grin (Fundaçao Getulio Vargas- Brazil)

Third Chair : Maria Ela Atienza (University of the Philippines Diliman)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

This panel examines climate governance not merely as an environmental issue, but as a fundamental test of state capacity, institutional resilience, and governments' ability to sustain collective action under fiscal constraints, administrative fragmentation, and policy dismantling (Morais de Sa e Silva, M. 2023). Key challenges include contested expertise, weakening intergovernmental relations, and multilevel arrangements where authority and resources are unevenly distributed (Peters 2018; Radinger-Peer et al., 2025; Dombrowsky et al., 2022).

Municipalities and metropolitan authorities face growing responsibilities—managing adaptation, emissions reduction, and energy transitions—while operating with dwindling resources and uncertain support from higher levels. This creates tension between their expanding roles and fragmented coordination systems (Marks & Pulliat, 2022). Research highlights relevant limitations of incomplete decentralization and persistent coordination challenges between national and subnational levels (Pizzini et al., 2025).

The panel investigates how subnational governments build or lose capacity : what happens when coordination is fragmented and political support is contested,and external sources of resources and expertise become increasingly important? It also investigates whether cooperation among governments, international organizations, and civil society can offset institutional fragmentation or reproduce inequalities.

Our panel explores climate governance through four interconnected dimensions:

1. Multilevel Governance and Social Participation:This dimension examines how national and subnational authorities coordinate climate objectives and how civil society, businesses, and community groups participate. Under what conditions societal networks strengthen public capacity versus generating fragmented accountability? Particular attention is paid to maintaining coordination under political polarization and institutional instability (Pierre & Peters, 2021).

2. Transnational Cooperation and External Resources: Development banks, international agencies, and transnational city networks provide funding, expertise, and policy models. The panel investigates how these resources are incorporated into local institutions, whether they strengthen administrative capabilities, and what happens when external support declines. Recent scholarship highlights the influence of transnational municipal cooperation and climate paradiplomacy in supporting local innovation beyond traditional state-centered frameworks (Acuto et al., 2024; Salazar, 2023).

3. Policy Dismantling and Climate Backlash: Moving beyond studies focused solely on policy expansion, this dimension examines institutional erosion, policy retrenchment, and declining political support. Climate transitions are shaped by both innovation and dismantling, creating pressures on long-term policy consistency and implementation capacities (Halpern & Mandelli, 2025; Schaub et al., 2024; Schaub, Tosun, & Jordan, 2024; Förell & Fischer, 2025).

4. Digital Transitions: Digital infrastructures increasingly function as governance instruments rather than just technical tools. Smart grids, AI-assisted planning, and monitoring systems can strengthen coordination but also generate new challenges, including energy pressures from AI and data centers. Digitalization may enhance state capacity while introducing new sources of complexity, dependency, and institutional vulnerability (Artigas, 2026).

The panel welcomes theoretical, methodological, and empirical contributions from diverse contexts, particularly comparative research across Europe, Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Africa. By connecting

these perspectives, the panel aims to advance a comparative understanding of how subnational climate governance capacity is constructed, maintained, contested, and transformed, explaining why similar challenges produce different institutional responses across contexts (Grin, 2025).

CALL FOR PAPERS

Climate action is a fundamental test of contemporary governance, raising critical questions about state capacity, institutional resilience, and the sustainability of collective action under fiscal constraints and administrative fragmentation. As climate responsibilities shift to subnational levels, authority and resources remain unevenly distributed, creating significant implementation gaps (Morais de Sa e Silva, 2023; Peters, 2018). Municipalities and metropolitan authorities are increasingly expected to manage adaptation, emissions reduction, energy transitions, and AI-related deployments, often with dwindling resources and uncertain higher-level support. This tension between expanding mandates and fragmented coordination systems defines the core challenge of current climate governance (Marks & Pulliat, 2022).

This panel examines climate governance as a problem of institutional change. Rather than assuming decentralization inherently strengthens or weakens climate action, we investigate how the distribution of responsibilities, authority, and expertise shapes subnational capacity to formulate and implement policies. We seek contributions that address four interconnected dimensions:

1. Multilevel Governance and Social Participation: How do national and subnational authorities coordinate objectives amidst political polarization? We examine when societal networks strengthen public capacity versus generating fragmented accountability, focusing on maintaining coordination during institutional instability (Pierre & Peters, 2021; Pizzini et al., 2025).

2. Transnational Cooperation and External Resources: Development banks, international agencies, and city networks provide funding and expertise. How are these external resources incorporated into local institutions? Do they build durable administrative capabilities or create dependencies? We welcome research on climate paradiplomacy and transnational municipal cooperation beyond state-centered frameworks (Acuto et al., 2024; Salazar, 2023).

3. Policy Dismantling and Climate Backlash: Moving beyond policy expansion, this dimension explores institutional erosion, retrenchment, and declining political support at the local level. How do simultaneous processes of innovation and dismantling pressure long-term policy consistency and implementation capacities? (Halpern & Mandelli, 2025; Schaub et al., 2024).

4. Digital Transitions:Digital infrastructures function as governance instruments, not just technical tools. How do smart grids, AI-assisted planning, and monitoring systems impact coordination? We explore how digitalization enhances capacity while introducing new complexities, dependencies, and vulnerabilities, such as energy pressures from data centers (Artigas, 2026).

We invite theoretical, methodological, and empirical contributions from diverse contexts. Comparative research across Europe, Latin America, Southeast Asia, is particularly encouraged, though submissions are open globally. Papers may address local, regional, national, and transnational actors. By connecting these perspectives, the panel aims to explain why similar climate challenges produce different institutional responses and how subnational capacity is constructed, contested, and transformed (Grin, 2025).