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Climate Change: A Global Governance Challenge, Requiring Local Specific Responses - The Challenge of Formulating a Successful Response at The Appropriate Governance Level

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| KEYWORDS | ABSTRACT |
|---|---|
| Climate Change, Global Governance, The State, Local Level Civil Society | <p><i>While Climate Change is a global phenomenon, the impact it generates is locally specific. Take, for example, the issue of sea-level rise. While we can identify a general process of sea-level rise, some localities are facing stronger impacts than others; this applies not only to island nations but also to coastal areas and coastal cities, including several so-called Megacities. Or take the issue of temperature increase, as some areas will experience more heatwaves or longer and more intensive periods of droughts. A comparable argument can be made in regard to intense rainfall and floods. Consequently, a critical issue is how to address global climate change by formulating a response at the global level or by formulating a variety of specific strategies at the local level. Yet, while some localities may react faster because of the threat they are exposed to, local-specific responses alone will be less likely to generate the scale effect required to arrest the global climate dynamic. Hence, at what level, local or global, should strategies formulated to address climate change represent a key issue. One may argue that a combination of responses at all three levels may offer a successful response, though this would raise the issue of how to integrate all three levels into one strategy.</i></p> |
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Framing the Discourse

The year 2021, with its floods, wildfires, storms, and heat waves, was a compelling reminder of the impact climate change has recently been generating. Yet, based on previous years' experiences, the indications are that 2021 was not a so-called 'once-a-century' episode. On the contrary, we have to recognise that the impacts caused by climate change will increase with time, not in a distant future, but it is happening right now. Underlining such a perception is the UNEP Adaptation Gap Report 2021, stating that by missing the emission targets to keep global warming at 1.5° Celsius, extreme weather events are becoming rather regular occurrences, describing climate change risks as a combination of exposure and vulnerability to climate challenges. Yet, within this scenario, it is worth remembering that while climate change represents a global threat and therefore offers a fitting illustration for formulating a global governance response, its impact is always locally specific. It is also worth remembering that global cooperation efforts like the Paris Agreement are based on climate models and consequently represent a top-down approach to addressing the impacts of

climate change, while climate impact assessments made at the local level represent bottom-up evaluations of the risks of climate change pose to specific localities and communities. Though the prospect for addressing climate risks and their impact at the local level may be higher, since it is the level where people and communities are directly confronted by the negative impacts of climate change, global commitments to address climate change impacts may still be required, not only as climate risks generate a transboundary impact but it is at the global level where the scale effect to address the climate change dynamic can be generated through global cooperation. At the same time, the global level is characterised by a plethora of different national and non-state actor interests, generating a considerable challenge for reaching robust agreements.

An equally crucial aspect of the climate change dynamic is that time is of vital importance, as related risks and impacts are on the increase, as well as the associated costs to people, communities, and the economy. There exists a real danger that we may pass a critical threshold beyond that the climate change dynamic can change from a linear process to one characterised by rather abrupt system changes. This trend will only continue because of our failure to address climate change comprehensively, that is, to stay within the 1.5° target. Based on the actual implementation rate of reducing GHG emissions, we are on course to a 2.7° warming scenario by the end of the century (Climate Action Tracker, 2021). This underperformance is addressed in various IPCC reports, as well as in other risk analyses like the most recent edition of the Global Risk Report (2022), stating that, short of a comprehensive response, our capacity for mitigating and adapting will shrink fast. Adding that the failure to act in addressing climate change has been identified as the risk category with the highest damage potential at the global level within the next decade. It should be remembered that mitigation failure enhances the adaptation pressure; as such, the primary focus should be on mitigation. After all, reducing the climate change dynamic in the first place is preferred to address the impact it generates. When considering the mitigation-adaptation context, one can think of a comparison with cancer, as it is preferred to avoid the outbreak of cancer in the first place, over-treating the symptoms of it later or, indeed, failing to do so altogether.

The failure to comprehensively address the climate change challenge is also related to the 'global commons' controversy. The global commons refer to shared natural resources and spaces outside national jurisdictions to which all states have access. The associated challenges have been well described by Hardin (1968: 1,244), who formulated the expression the 'tragedy of the commons', that the tragedy of the commons refers to a situation in which individual rational behaviour will lead to collective consequences no one wished for as individual interests are not aligned with group interests. Primary examples include the open ocean or the atmosphere. As climate change-related negotiations strongly indicate, addressing global commons issues to agree on rules and regulations underlines the complexity associated with such an undertaking.

While we have witnessed a steady increase of awareness and worries about the impacts of environmental degradation and the impacts generated by climate change, there still seems to be some failure to recognise the extent of the challenge we are facing, as indicated by our inability to reducing GHG emission as required to stay with the 1.5-degree target. Aside from poor risk evaluation practices, despite improvements, there is a lack of understanding about the appropriate solutions (Adapt Now, 2019). Even as events in 2021, and the years before, highlight the various climate change-related risks and impacts, it seems there still persists a lack of local climate change-related risk awareness, though one may argue that a process of recognition has already begun. Yet, if one considers the resources spent on military expenditures while recognising our failure to provide enough resources for a comprehensive mitigation strategy to address the climate change dynamic, one could argue that the level of awareness with regard to climate change risks is still rather limited. To address this continuous shortcoming in recognising climate change-related risks, Ploberger and Filho (2016) argued for the integration of climate change-related risks in standard risk evaluation procedures. Assigning a particular risk category to climate change, comparable to economic or

political risks, therefore supporting a rising awareness of those specific risks and consequently highlighting the vulnerability of specific locations, communities, and regions, as well as countries, to the impacts of climate change. One can express hope that major recent risk evaluations, like the Global Risk Report 2022, will also contribute to greater awareness of climate change-related risks.

Addressing climate change represent one of the most pressing global governance challenges of our time, aside from another infectious outbreak like COVID-19, and will remain so for the foreseeable future with potentially long-lasting impact generated by climate change-related dynamics and risks. Based on our failure to implement agreements and targets on reducing GHG emissions raises questions about what level - local, regional, or global is the most appropriate to focus on. Indeed, whether we should aim for a coherent global approach or for a variety of local and regional-specific strategies when trying to address the climate change dynamic represents a still not answered but crucial question. An equally critical topic is whether we need support and even merge strategies at different levels or if only one level response would be able to generate enough impact to arrest the climate change dynamic and thus reduce the related risks to people and communities. However, we should remember the local-specific impact global climate change generates since there is no uniformity in the impact generated by climate change. Indeed, climate change vulnerability is context-specific.

Climate Change: a global challenge generating diverse local and regional impacts

While we rightly consider climate change a global phenomenon since multiple climatic impact drivers are projected to generate changes in all regions of the world (IPCC, 2021), we still have to acknowledge the specific local and regional impact climate change creates. According to the Fifth IPCC Assessment Report's chapter on Asia, precipitation trends in Asia are characterised by strong variability, consequently generating regionally diverse impacts on food production and food security. It adds that a large number of Asia's communities living in low-elevation coastal zones are highly vulnerable to the impact of sea-level rise, storm surges, and typhoons (IPCC, 2014). The 2019 IPCC report on the impact of sea-level rise also highlights the diversity and dynamic character of regional and local impacts with regard to coastal infrastructure, communities, and agriculture areas based on risks associated with coastal erosion, flooding and salinisation (Oppenheimer et al., 2019). The IPCC (2021) report continues to confirm earlier predictions of regional variations of climate change impacts generated by heat extremes, heavy precipitation, and observable changes in agricultural and ecological drought. A UNESCO water report offers additional insight into the climate change-generated impact by emphasising the implications for local and regional water run-off, evapotranspiration, and flood risks, as well as for water quality (UNESCO UN-Water, 2020). By emphasising the local specific impact of sea-level rise, Hooijer and Vernimmen (2021: 1-2) point out that land less than 2 meters above sea level is most vulnerable to sea-level rise, adding that 59 per cent of the global land associated with the 2-meter level risk is located in tropical Asia, accounting for 31 per cent of the global population exposure. Strassburg et al. (2015: 744) stress that Southeast Asia has, in the last two decades, experienced rates of sea-level rise more than double the global mean. Even so, when considering the regional variability of climate change impacts, one has also to consider the variety of impacts within a region. Indonesia, for example, has been identified as the country with the largest extent of land below the 2-meter mark, so its exposure to rising coastal flood risks encompasses 6.1 per cent of its land territory (Hooijer and Vernimmen, 2021: 4). One can add other examples like Vietnam's Mekong delta which is also under threat from sea-level rise and saltwater intrusions; Bangkok's metropolitan area and Singapore provide additional examples of critical sea-level rise exposure, as it the case with Ho Chi Minh City and Manila. Hence, albeit sea-level rise represents a global threat, various localities and regions are facing a greater challenge.

This recognition of climate change-related risks to coastal cities not only draws our attention to local and regional-specific climate change-related risks but emphasises a spatial focus for climate change-

risk evaluation. The C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group, for example, emphasises that climate change-related risks are impacting every city differently, linked to geographic settings as well as socioeconomic and demographic aspects (C40 Policy Brief January 2022). Taking extreme heat as an example, the number of people affected by it will rise from the current 200 million to over 1.6 billion, from 350 to 970 affected cities. Regarding the impact of sea-level rise, it is anticipated that over 800 million people in more than 570 cities will be affected (The Future We Don't Want, 2018: 6). Taking into account that climate change impacts are not restricted by specific localities or borders, their impact can also be felt within the regional level. As for the regional level, in this paper and within the context of the climate change dynamic, it is treated as an extension of the local level. Within this context, its main relevance is linked to the basic character of climate change-related risks, as coastal and land features are of more relevance than any imagined political border. Even within the regional level, some localities are stronger exposed to the negative impacts than others. Northeast Asia's Dust storms (Yellow Dust) or the impact generated by the El Niño-Southern Oscillation offer good examples, as does sea-level rise. Hence, the impact of climate change can be scattered over a wider geographic area, consequently adding the regional level as another focus. Just take sea-level rise as an example. While the impact is locally specific, like threatening particular communities, the exposure to sea-level rise can also encompass a wider area like delta areas or extended coastlines. Indeed, considering the impact of climate change on international river systems, like the Mekong, the Brahmaputra, or the Danube River Basin, offer additional insight into the value of taking a regional focus.

While it is evident that progress in addressing the climate change dynamic has been made over the last couple of decades, the scale of this process has not been extensive enough to arrest the climate change dynamic or to reduce climate change-related risks. Indeed, exposure to climate change risk is increasing locally, regionally and globally. So far, the occasional, strongly articulated statements at the global level about addressing climate change have not been translated into meaningful responses to reduce the global climate change dynamic. For sure, the variety of GHG sources and their link to the economy and our way of life increases the complexity of reaching an agreement at the global level. And while the database for climate change, its impacts, and its sources become more evidence-based and solidified, some scientific uncertainty regarding local and regional impact predictions remain and contribute to further impediments to comprehensively addressing the global climate change dynamic. At the same time, locally felt impacts related to the climate change dynamic do generate a stronger awareness of related risks, especially at the local level. This does raise questions, like at what level - global, regional, local - the response generated will be enough impact to arrest the climate change dynamic, and to what extent different level responses either support one another or generate a diverting trend, consequently undermining our efforts to address climate change?

Global Governance - offering a solution or mission failure (2006)

While global governance signifies a form of governance, rules, and regulations at a particular level, global governance does not refer to a government, as no formalised hierarchical order within global politics exists. Weiss (2013) describes global governance as a collective effort in identifying and addressing global challenges that go beyond the capacities of individual states. Thakur and Langenhove (2006: 22) add that global governance represents an additional layer of consultations and decision-making between and alongside governments and intergovernmental organisations. Hence, global governance offers an opportunity to address specific cross-border issues that individual countries cannot address on their own by formulating specific rules and regulations as a means of tackling issues related to the global commons challenge. Chasek, Downie and Brown (2017: 162) emphasise that climate change represents the prototype of global commons issues by affecting all nations but also requiring comprehensive cooperation in response to address it. While one can argue that the pressure to address the challenges the global commons faces has increased

considerably (with the climate change dynamic offering the most insightful example), there is a fundamental failure to formulate global governance regimes to address those challenges. Indeed, a UN report reminds us that increasing interdependence between states has not been matched by an equal development of global cooperation mechanisms, as no comprehensive framework addressing global commons topics exists; it added that enhancing the governance of the global commons represents a specific task of environmental policy and in support of sustainable development (Global Governance and Governance of the Global Commons, 2015). However, some are still optimistic about the ability of the global community of states to cooperate, as argued by Hagen and Crombez (2018), stating that the destruction of the global commons would have such disastrous impacts on humanity that a strict global governance response may still be agreed on.

It is worth pointing out that global governance is linked with allocating responsibility of ‘who will do what’ and ‘how much’, as it aims to establish a regulatory setting when addressing a specific global challenge. What Karns, Mingst, and Stiles (2015: 39) described as a request for clarity concerning ‘to whom’, ‘for what’, and ‘by what mechanism’, adding that global governance actors should be accountable. Weiss (2013: 32) reminds us of a critical limitation of global governance; that it is governance minus government, indicating a missing capacity when implementing collective decisions adding that the diversity of actors involved in global governance also dilutes the political authority and accountability. Addressing climate change at the global level, or the inability to do so in ways that can stop its ongoing dynamic, indicates both a demand and task for global governance, even if there is an absence of authority. Indeed, we must be explicit about to what extent states and civil society actors are accountable in formulating a response to a specific global challenge, as well as implementing specific steps once an agreement has been reached. Indeed, with the increasing involvement of different actors in addressing the climate change impact, we can observe a shift of responsibility from the state to non-state actors or what Hickmann (2015) describes as a discussion about the potential shift in authority in world politics. Even though we tend to celebrate civil society involvement in governance and global governance affairs, there are still lasting questions about the legitimacy of NGOs (beyond their imminent support groups), such as a lack of wider accountability and representation or the concern that they may be self-serving and represent a non-elected body. On the other hand, one can argue that the support they generate does indicate the level of legitimacy they hold. But again, it is not unproblematic to determine how far this support reaches within a population or, indeed, at the global level. Though, global climate change and environmental protest movements like ‘Fridays for Future’ or ‘Extinction Rebellion’, not to mention Greenpeace, are a strong indication of the ability of global non-government activism. Examples include their ability to organise global climate strikes (September 25, 2019, and September 24 2021) with extensive participation around the world, such as ‘Fridays for Future’, among a plethora of ongoing actions globally, at the regional and local level. In addition, it cannot be denied that NGOs provide extensive technical expertise to many people and for specific challenges, which strongly suggests that they could provide the capacity for compliance monitoring. In that way, NGOs can affect strategies for addressing specific challenges, whether they are local, regional, or global in character. However, even when they are able to mobilise beyond national borders, they are still limited in their ability to generate a lasting impact, as they do not have the same institutional legitimacy and formal political power as the state. Climate activism can certainly change the domestic political discourse by adding specific subjects to the domestic political discourse, as the Green Movement in various European states has done successfully for decades now. Yet, they are able to influence the domestic political agenda and, thus, extension, the international agenda, as they transformed from protest groups into established political parties, thereby generating lasting political impact. Still, while the impact non-state climate activists may generate on the global level is less evident with regard to binding political decision-making, even though it should not be denied that activism outside of state power can generate a political impact even at the global level, we still have to recognise their impact on global governance in general. As emphasised by Porter (2009: 87), a distinctive characteristic of global governance is its entanglement of non-state and state activities, one which is often underestimated.

Yet, a global public, as a specific political entity, does not exist, and for that reason, any impact generated by globally acting NGOs still will need to be translated via state power. Only states have the ability to make binding international decisions, even though state authority has been coming under increasing pressure. As for NGO influence, despite their power to mobilise regularly and on occasion globally, such protests did not prevent the United States from withdrawing from the Paris Agreement in November 2019, which encouraged anti-climate change activists and governments critical of introducing a transformation towards a non-fossil fuel-based economy.

This leads to another lasting and linked question: the enduring power of the state. States share some unique characteristics not available to other actors, among them a bureaucracy, a legislative and legal system, sovereignty, and coercive capacities. After all, multilateral negotiations are key aspects of global governance. States also provide a structural setting for other actors. Hay and Lister (2005: 12) emphasise that the state generates an institutional contextualisation in which other actors are able to orient themselves. We may also remember North's description of state structure, which he identifies as an 'institutional matrix' (North 1999: 115). All of which underscores the continuous relevance of the state. Another equally critical aspect of state power is linked to their legitimacy to act and their ability to agree on binding agreements with other states. As stated by the recently published UNEP Adaptation Gap Report (2021), national adaptation planning remains a critical aspect in the global emphasis to address the impacts of climate change, yet the report added that, despite an increase in national adaptation strategies, national adaptation policies are falling short in comprehensively addressing climate change risks. Hence, at the same time, states can also be identified as the source of failure to agree on global governance strategies to address global problems because of particular national interests.

Considering the plurality of actors in global policies, a related topic is how many actors should be involved when formulating a response to a global governance challenge. Primarily, one can differentiate between a strategy focusing on a small number of participants, based on a so-called 'coalition of the willing', with the aim of agreeing on strong targets, or alternatively, on a large number of participants, but aiming at focusing on a softer target. These alternative approaches are usually described as 'narrow-but-deep' versus 'broad-but-shallow' approaches. One can identify arguments for and against each strategy. For example, one could argue that a small number of participants may allow a faster conclusion and implementation of a global governance strategy, in addition to a stronger commitment to addressing a specific challenge. However, a counterargument would be that such an agreement based on a small number of actors may not be strong enough to comprehensively address a particular challenge. This is a topic especially relevant in addressing climate change and its impacts. Biermann et al. (2009) ask for caution, as it is doubtful whether an agreement reached with a small membership would improve the overall performance in addressing a global challenge, as it may preclude an extension of participants since the agreement reached may be linked to specifically to the interests of the involved participants. On the other hand, with climate change in mind, if it would be possible to get the major GHG emitters to agree on a strategy to address their emissions, the reduction achieved may be sufficient to reduce the climate change dynamic. In such a scenario, the participation of an even wider variety of actors may not be essential, even though it still would be welcomed. Within the climate change context, one may consider applying such a strategy to the G20 grouping. It is worth taking into account that the G20 as a group not only contributes 76 per cent of global emissions (Dagnet et al., 2021: 16) but also represents 63 per cent of the global population and generates 87 per cent of gross world output (Global Commons Stewardship Index 2021). Another thought concerning the discourse between a small or large membership when agreeing on a global governance strategy may deem it appropriate to focus on a more extensive membership, despite the earlier mentioned challenges, as this could increase the legitimacy of such a strategy and consequently support its implementation. However, global government strategy formulation with an extended membership does face the challenge of integrating numerous and often diverse interests, potentially undermining a successful and timely

response to a particular global challenge leading to a fundamental question: can unity be found within plurality?

Karns, Mingst, and Stiles (2015: 1) emphasise that the requirement for global governance is not an 'if' question; indeed, it is a 'how' question. If anything, the failure of international cooperation in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the most fundamental challenges humanity has faced in recent times, has exposed our incapacity for successful global cooperation. Addressing climate change seems to be another candidate for global cooperation failure, even though some agreements have been reached. What the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change have in common is that they represent global, regional, and local challenges at the same time. There is an additional aspect we should be aware of when advocating a global governance solution to a specific global challenge: that building or enhancing a particular global governance structure may be described as a late response to the emergence of a particular issue. This position is advocated by Thakur and Langenhove (2006: 17), pointing out that an evolving global governance setting represents a lagging response to an emerging collective action challenge. This reveals a critical aspect, especially with regard to global climate change.

However, while it would be inappropriate to state that climate change-related announcements at the global level are nothing but 'hot air', it is still an observable fact that the global community is missing earlier agreed targets, such as staying within a 1.5° or even 2° increase temperature. This brings us back to the general focus of this paper: what level of response - global, regional, or local - can offer the best response in addressing climate change? The relevance of addressing climate change and related risks at different levels increases with rising threat intensity since it is at the local and regional levels where those threats manifest themselves.

Local responses: an alternative focus for addressing the climate change dynamic and related risks?

The basic argument put forward is that local and regional responses are being implemented more quickly and will not need to wait until an agreement at the global level has been reached. Indeed, whatever global governance strategy is agreed on, it is still necessary to translate such global guidelines into domestic law, again consuming time in the process. Alternatively, one can argue that local initiatives take advantage of the dynamics at the local level, where the climate change impact is felt most acutely, and thus mobilise strong social, economic, and political responses based on a perception that there is a necessity to act now. There is another potential trade-off, as such local and regional cooperation may also contribute to a change of perception on climate change, thus enhancing the willingness of more people and communities to participate in identifying a response to climate change impacts by supporting not only adaptation strategies but by contributing to mitigation efforts, as well. Cooperation arrangements like the C40 also remind us of the growing relations between civil society and non-state and state actors to address the various impacts generated by climate change. Extensive regulations and agreements at the local and regional levels offer additional support for a transnational focus on addressing climate change risks and impacts. From such a perspective, fragmentation or climate anarchy does offer an opportunity to act and to act now. Indeed, there is no need to wait for a global governance policy strategy to await the outcome of ongoing negotiations at the global level. In addition, there exists the ability to disseminate specific knowledge and experience in addressing climate risks and mitigation strategies through such networks, consequently supporting the application and adaptation of different policy strategies. This, in turn, even further highlights the local level as an appropriate focus for climate change policy.

While local responses are crucial in addressing the impact of climate change, there exist limitations as to what extent local responses can generate enough impact in arresting global climate change. Such concern is linked to the ability of local resources to instigate mitigation and adaptation

strategies and to implement them. Undeniably, such an undertaking does require comprehensive capacities and resources at different government levels to access and interpret data, as well as to formulate and, importantly, to implement adaptation strategies. Recognising the complexity of adaptation, Mfitumukiza et al. (2020) point out that while there is a need for a local response to climate change risks and impacts, community-based responses have been badly organised. The GAR Special Report on Drought identifies various shortcomings regarding local responses. For example, local responses often constitute an ‘after response’ once a negative impact already materialised; or the discontinuation of policy responses once a situation improves; even a similar threat may re-occur in the near future. Capacity gap, limited knowledge, poor assessments of vulnerability, weak coordination at national and regional levels, and lack of policy option awareness were identified as additional challenges (GAR, 2021). Adding to the challenge is that adaptation strategies need to be implemented in the context of a rising climate change dynamic since mitigation strategies are failing to limit global warming. Take the example of sea-level rise. One scenario plans adaptation measures based on the 1.5-degree goal. Yet, as we are en route to missing this target, though for now, none can estimate to what extent, there is a recognition that current adaptation planning will not be sufficient. Still, additional challenges are for what alternative scenario should adaptation strategies be formulated, and what will be the impact on the sea-level rise of our failure to keep GHG level to the previously agreed level? Still, one may argue, as Mfitumukiza et al. (2020) indicates, that a merging of local knowledge with climate science data would greatly enhance community-based adaptation responses, though he cautions, as adaption represents a continuing and repeating process, divided into planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Regarding adaptation strategies at the local and regional levels, the 2019 IPCC Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate point out that, with regard to coastal erosion, flooding, and salinisation, technical limits to hard protection strategies exist (Oppenheimer et al., 2019).

In addition to adaptation, the local level also takes on a crucial role in mitigation efforts. The UN World Cities Report (2020) identifies not only the challenges of climate change-related risks for urban development but also the contributions of cities to the climate change dynamic by pointing out that cities not only generate 70 per cent of global carbon emissions but also consume two-thirds of global energy. Considering their contributions to the climate change dynamic and their increasing exposure to the associated risks, it becomes apparent that cities have a vital role in mitigating climate change as well as in formulating adaptation strategies to reduce the impact of climate change-related risks. Taking together cities’ contribution and exposure to global climate change provides another argument for a regional and local focus when considering how best to respond to such risks. Indeed, the local ability to support mitigation should not be neglected; after all, locally-based mitigation efforts, like a reduction in GHG, can have the additional effect of reducing local air pollution and thus contribute further to the health of the local population. Considering local responses to address climate change and related risks, this adds a bottom-up, decentralised governance feature to the existing global governance structure based on UN-supported global climate change policies like the Paris Agreement. Therefore, the ability or inability of the local level to address and respond to climate change risks and the global climate change dynamic has become a critical issue in both addressing and arresting climate change impacts.

Within academia, a related discourse between transnational and multilateralists takes on a central relevance. While multilateralists focus on international climate negotiations, transnationalism point to the variety of climate initiatives at the subnational and civil society level, such as the previously mentioned C40 city cooperation; they also include cooperation beyond national borders. The multifaceted and numeral cases of such cooperations give support to what Dyer (2014: 182) describes as ‘climate anarchy’. Yet, limited cooperation in pursuing a more active response in addressing climate change can also be found at the national level, where we can witness the occurrence of what is often described as ‘minilateral initiatives’ or ‘climate clubs’, representing a loose form of cooperation between nation states with a shared interest in addressing climate change (Hickmann

2017: 433). Bulkely and Newell (2010: 69) stated that transnational climate change governance addresses issues of effectiveness and accountability, while Baeckstrand (2008) claims that transnational cooperation may be interpreted as a response to both a regulatory and implementation deficit associated with multilateral cooperation. In offering another perspective on this mosaic of climate change cooperation, Ostrom (2010) applied the term 'polycentric systems', which indicates the existence of various independent centres which are still loosely connected through various cooperative arrangements, which allow them to enhance innovation and to learn from one another, and which are characterised by the absence of a central authority.

Even so, further challenges remain. When considering that global governance mitigation efforts fail to address the climate change dynamic, like missing the 1.5-degree target, the pressure on adaptation increases in its relevance. This applies especially at the local level, where the impact is felt directly and thus will require updating existing and adding additional adaptation strategies. With reference to the 2021 extreme climate events, one could argue that adaptation planning should include a greater margin of future risk exposure evaluation. The discourse about the scale of reference to future climate change impacts and the formulation of related adaptation strategies is also related to what is described as the 'precautionary principle'. Accordingly, responses should be formulated when threats of serious or irreversible damage are anticipated, while a lack of full scientific certainty should not offer a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to address such risks (TAR Climate Change, 2001). Yet applying the precautionary principle implies that we have to make assumptions not only about the potential impact of a particular climate change risk but also the costs associated with implementing such a strategy. This could constitute a particular political challenge since resources are not only always scar, but political pressure to divide resources into different policies also exists. Adding to this challenge is that policy strategies are mutating throughout the mobilisation and implementation process as different economic and social interests are mobilised.

While local government, non-government, and civil society actors interpret a local and regional focus as an alternative to the dragging-on of climate change-related negotiations at the global level, some potential limitations can be identified. After all, these varieties of limited cooperation focus on the specific impacts of climate change on a specific locality or region. As a result, the orientation and implementation perspective has become rather narrow, and so far, actions taken at the local level have not generated a response sufficient enough to arrest the global climate change dynamic. The Global Commission on Adaptation also alerts us to the needs and challenges involved in supporting local adaptation processes by stating that, while the requirement for wide-ranging adaptation is already recognised, the pace and scale required to address climate change risks and impacts are missing (Adopt Now 2019). Hence, critical questions remain, like to what extent such cooperation below the national level will help with solving versus merely addressing the impacts generated by climate change. This situation is further aggregated by our seeming inability to implement stronger and more timely mitigation strategies, which further enhances the adaptation pressure. While local and regional level responses are increasing in their relevance, not least in the protection of threatened communities, Hickmann (2016) points out that transnationalism does not seem to indicate a shift in global climate governance in undermining multinational cooperation, even if it seems to indicate such a shift in focus. So, we may still have to look towards the global level to formulate a scale effect response, to further a strong focus on global mitigation strategies, as this would reduce the pressure on local adaptation processes.

Conclusion

This paper discusses the complexity of addressing climate change as a global governance challenge by raising the question of at what level the climate change dynamic and related risks can be best addressed. While there are convincing arguments for focusing on the global level – by formulating a global governance response which may generate the required scale of response to address and

eventually minimise the global climate change dynamic – there are equally strong arguments to be found for focusing on the local level. After all, it is at that level where people and communities are experiencing the actual impact of climate change, where climate risks are transformed from abstract considerations into real-life experiences. There are additional trade-offs identifiable when focusing on the local level as the reduction of local GHG emissions not only contributes to addressing the climate change dynamic but also contributes to a reduction of the local, even regional, air pollution impact. Offering another positive contribution to the health of the local population. This concreteness of climate change-related impacts at the local level also generates another effect as various localities share their experience and their responses when facing the impacts of climate change-related risks. This, in turn, leads to the building of locally based international networks, like the global C40 city networks, facilitating a wider distribution of specific experiences made as well as sharing adaptation experiences. In doing so, their cooperation generates a scale effect in addressing global climate change. There exists another argument for focusing on the local level: since a smaller number of actors are involved when compared with the global governance level, this offers the opportunity for a faster response to climate change-related risks and impacts.

While there exists agreement on the increasing contribution of the local level in addressing (adaptation) and arresting (mitigation) the global climate change dynamic and related risks, it is also recognised that, for the time being, the extent of responses generated at the local level is not sufficient in scale to reduce the climate change dynamic to a level that will limit global warming by 1.5° Celsius, or even to stay below the 2° Celsius target agreed within the Paris Agreement. There is also evidence that actors at the local level often do not have sufficient capacities or know-how to address climate change risks and impacts and to implement appropriate adaptation strategies. This represents a specific issue for lesser developed countries. This, in turn, indicates some limitations of the local level approach and suggests that we may still have to turn to the global governance level as the relevant level to generate the required scale effect in arresting the global climate change dynamic.

Returning to the global governance level, we are still facing the same fundamental challenge as previously outlined: how to align the plethora of diverse interests to formulate a timely response that can address climate change at the global level with agreed targets that have a binding character. We may remember the US government changing its attitude to global climate commitments, by first joining, only after insisting that their demands are met and then quitting global climate agreements like the Paris Agreement. While the actual US government has now re-joined the Paris Agreement, one may wonder for how long? This episode offers a clear indication of the additional challenges global government approaches are facing. As such, a focus on the local level to provide a timely response to climate change-related risks to people and communities does offer an alternative perspective. Yet, it is the global governance level that has the potential to generate the scale of response capable of addressing global climate change, even though, for the present time, the global community is failing in this task. As a final thought, we should keep in mind potential challenges in aligning local and global approaches in addressing climate change. After all, it could be a considerable challenge to align local-specific responses with global governance strategies, thus contributing to further fragmentation of climate change responses, with the potential of undermining global governance strategies and the ability to generate the required scale effect in reducing the climate change dynamic.

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