

Harnessing Research for Climate Ambition and Transparency

Based on the proceedings of the 4th Global Climate
Policy Conference | *São Paulo - Brazil, 16-17 August 2018*



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Authors: Sonja Klinsky, based on GCPC 2018 presentations and reports from the rapporteurs

Editor: Claudia Delpero

Rapporteurs: Carolina Grottera, Alexandra Carr, Alessandro Sanches-Pereira

Conference Committee: Michael Mehling (Chair), Alice Amorim, Sonja Klinsky, Karina Marzano, Maria Jose Sanz Sanchez, Charlotte Streck, Jorge Villarreal

Project management: Alexandra Carr, Andrzej Błachowicz, Karina Marzano

Design: Maria Clara Thedim

Photography: Ricardo Lisboa, Yantra Imagens

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All presentations and articles mentioned in the report can be downloaded from <https://climatestrategies.org/gcpc-2018/>

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Foreword



A robust interface between science and policy has never been more critical in order to address the challenge of climate change. Recent political developments also suggest that it has rarely been more elusive. Just as the international community gains greater clarity about the scale of the required effort – the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change recently described it as having “no documented historic precedent” – the reality of climate change and the need for an urgent response are being questioned by a growing number of elected leaders and government officials around the world.

Even in the best of times, discussions about climate change have been vulnerable to polarisation and partisanship. With populism and nationalist retrenchment on the rise, however, such pressures have only multiplied. Cuts to basic re-

search funding in various countries and eroding perceptions of the value and authority of science in public discourse not only make it harder to sustain a productive exchange between researchers and political decision makers, but also,



Michael Mehling (chair of GCPC 2018)

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Such traits will be critical to overcome the inertia and indifference that prevent us from effectively addressing the collective challenge of global climate change

in some cases, undermine the scientific process itself.

Such is the troubling backdrop against which the 4th Global Climate Policy Conference (GCPC) took place in São Paulo, Brazil, on the 16th and 17th of August 2018. Its organisers – Climate Strategies (CS), Instituto Clima et Sociedade (iCS), Iniciativa Climática de Mexico (ICM), and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation’s Regional Programme on Energy Security and Climate Change in Latin America (KS-EKLA) – convened this event under the timely heading of ‘Harnessing

Research for Climate Ambition and Transparency’, linking it to the ongoing operationalisation and domestic implementation of the Paris Agreement.

Brazil was a prescient location for the event. Chosen, in part, for its importance as an actor in global climate cooperation, it has seen budget cuts and persistent turmoil in domestic politics gradually reverse progress on important projects such as the reduction of tropical deforestation in the Amazon basin. The winning candidate in the recent presidential election, Jair Bolsonaro, has echoed the rhetoric of populist leaders in other countries by disparaging climate action and promising to place economic growth ahead of environmental concerns. As other countries in Latin America advance encouraging climate policy roadmaps, the largest emitter in the region threatens to withdraw from the collective effort altogether.

In such a context, where simplifications and falsehoods define climate policy choices at the highest level, fostering a debate across geographic boundaries and academic disciplines becomes more than an intellectual exercise. It acquires the character of a necessary, perhaps even indispensable corrective to the failure of established institutions in enabling the open and impartial epistemic process needed to successfully govern a policy challenge as complex as climate change. Informal, polycentric channels of knowledge creation and exchange acquire new importance, mirroring a broader trend in climate governance.



Photography by Ricardo Lisboa, Yantra Imagens

GCPC 4th edition in São Paulo

And that is the great value of the 4th GCPC, delivered at a critical time for the region in which it was hosted. With its commitment to advancing actionable research ideas, and an astute format that matches researchers with public and private decision makers, the GCPC has consistently enriched climate policy debates with original policy proposals. Its latest edition featured presentations drawn from an impressive pool of submitted abstracts, and covered a range of cross-cutting and specific topics that are directly relevant to the international and domestic climate policy debate.

This report summarises central themes and outcomes of the proceedings of the 4th GCPC. I hope it succeeds in conveying the diversity, originality, and sheer excitement of the discussions in São Paulo. Because, as is also increasingly clear, such traits will be critical to overcome the inertia and indifference that prevent us from effectively addressing the collective challenge of global climate change.

Michael Mehling
Chair of GCPC 2018

Introduction



The Global Climate Policy Conference (GCPC) is the flagship event for Climate Strategies. The 4th edition, held in São Paulo, Brazil, on August 16th and 17th 2018, looked to harness research to boost ambition and transparency in climate action, particularly within the Latin America region.

The annual conference opens up a unique space of dialogue in which the academic and policy communities come together to identify the key questions that need to be asked in order to address the multidimensional challenges posed by climate change, and to discuss what answers researchers suggest in this regard.



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GCPC 4th edition in São Paulo



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GPCP 4th edition in São Paulo

The first day of the conference revolves around the subjects emerging from the research submitted for the event and selected by the conference committee. This 'bottom-up' element helps ensure that new voices are heard, and that new proposals from the research community are visible. The second day focuses on integrating research into political and policy processes. It features senior government advisors, businesses and civil society, and all those actors engaged in the policy process. This 'top-down' element helps researchers connect their work with policy-making and generates new ideas about the challenges of implementing the policies needed for an adequate response to climate change.

Each edition of the GPCP is held in a different region, a purposeful decision to ensure all contexts and views are considered. Regional networking and knowledge sharing are key components of successful policy implementation. Holding regional conferences is therefore an important contribution to the development of this capacity. Countries' ability to address climate and development challenges is also connected to investments in research and policy communities. An added benefit of the GPCP regional approach is the facilitation of contributions from a wide range of participants, including those usually not taking part in major international events. This not only stimulates new



Photography by Ricardo Lisboa, Yantra Imagens

GIPC 4th edition in São Paulo

ideas, but also constitutes an investment in researchers and policy-makers in the region.

The GIPC's interaction between research and science on one hand, and policy design and implementation on the other, together with its commitment to nurture regional and national networks and knowledge, matches the emphasis on national action deriving from the Paris Agreement.

As a region, Latin America faces a range of challenges closely linked to climate change, from land-use and forestry

management to rapid urbanisation. At the same time, many countries in the region have emerged as global leaders on both climate adaptation and mitigation. As attention to the implementation of Nationally Determine Contributions (NDCs) intensifies, what kind of actions are being put in place in Latin America? What research is needed to support climate policy and implementation in this region? Which specific regional challenges and opportunities need to be highlighted? These were some of the themes discussed at this year's GIPC, which are summarised in this publication.

Cross-Cutting Themes



The distinctive bottom-up and top-down approach makes the GPC quite agile in capturing emerging discussions in a particular regional context. Some of these discussions might be tied to specific policy challenges, while others are relevant across many policy efforts. We identified two cross-cutting themes that emerged as central to the climate policy challenges in the region: governance and finance.

Theme 1 – Governance

Possibly the strongest cross-cutting theme of the conference, governance strategies that can facilitate or complicate climate action were discussed from both an adaptation and mitigation perspective. In many cases, these challenges extend beyond the boundaries of climate policy and require thinking about governance more generally as a central domain in sustainable development.

One key element within this discussion was the challenge of **building effective institutions** that are capable of guiding decisions that are often contentious, and that can apply at different scales or in different contexts. Conference participants identified several opportunities to invest in institutional capacity in order to support climate policy. For example, to ensure that trade rules do not impact

negatively on climate policy, it may be useful to further invest in international standards and the organisations developing them. Being rooted in the context, and setting expectations across actors and jurisdictions, such arrangements could alleviate concerns about unfair trade practices that may stem from the pursuit of climate policy goals.

Several participants highlighted the importance of building the capacities of local and state-level governments. “Climate action is increasingly pursued at these levels, but their governments often face significant resource and capacity constraints, which limits their ability to operate effectively in this area. The diversity of initiatives pursued at these levels – from urban planning to

forest management or the deployment of renewable energy – can put institutions under strain if they do not have the technical expertise, organisational capacity or administrative strength to effectively implement them.

Another theme of this discussion concerned the potential to create entirely new institutions designed to enable climate policies that previously would have been difficult or impossible. Such developments are still relatively young, so evaluating them is difficult, but there was interest in continuing to experiment with them and interrogating their effects. The climate change law recently adopted in Mexico and the renewables law in Argentina were both cited as examples of this kind of institutional



One of the benefits of the GCPC is the opportunity to talk about specific challenges countries and communities are facing. Corruption emerged as a central concern for domestic policy implementation

“experiments”. In both cases they create new opportunities for implementation, but their effectiveness also depends on sufficient support, clarity and commitment at local, state and national levels.

A second focal point was the importance of **integration across institutions**. In many cases it is apparent that multiple entities are involved in decisions on climate action. Integration and coordination are therefore essential but have been challenging. The need for effective integration across institutions and policies on land-use was a particularly strong element of the discussion in the Latin American context. Participants highlighted the problem of having several ministries and departments with jurisdiction over land-use. This shared responsibility makes it hard for stakeholders to understand who is in charge of what. It has also profound implications for effective processes of transparency and accountability. Several participants

discussed the importance of integration in the urban context as, again, there are often conflicts or overlaps amongst levels of government or across departments and this can impede policy effectiveness.

The risks to accountability posed by the lack of integration were also highlighted in a discussion about governance focusing on the need to **enhance government accountability and manage corruption**. One of the benefits of the GCPC is the opportunity to talk about specific challenges countries and communities are facing. Corruption emerged as a central concern for domestic policy implementation. Recognising this as part of the governance challenge shows the importance of some other demands, e.g. for careful investment in local and state governments. It further recognises that these levels need more capacity to face corruption pressures at the same time. It was noted that failing to address corruption can make other promising policy options (including, but not limited to,

south-south exchanges or other forms of collaboration) more difficult and less likely to yield positive results. Although this often falls outside the usual understandings of “climate governance”, taking corruption seriously at multiple levels of government is essential to support effective climate policy.

A fourth major theme of discussion was **facilitating and tracking progress**. In many occasions, participants in the conference talked about the challenges of measuring progress that include, but also go beyond, activities traditionally associated with Monitoring, Reporting and Verification (MRV). The focus of these conversations was not only on developing MRV that can track emissions, but also on finding ways of using evidence to facilitate domestic action and progress. Fully understanding how policies work and why is essential to improve and implement domestic policy, regardless of other goals for measurement and assessment.

This wider understanding of the tracking process may also require broadening analytical frameworks. Climate and human development policies are multidimensional, which means that there is a need to develop and use analytical frameworks capable of reflecting this diversity and providing meaningful evaluations. One example that was discussed in some depth was Initiative for Climate Action Transparency (ICAT), which focuses on the assessment of organisational capacities and on helping entire organisations reflect and learn in the context of policy implementation. Participants also discussed the monitoring

Climate and human development policies are multidimensional, which means that there is a need to develop and use analytical frameworks capable of reflecting this diversity

challenges of specific policy areas, such as forestry, but also recognised that government accountability and action require increased attention.

Finally, a fifth theme within the governance umbrella was about **generating and maintaining adequate political mobilisation** for effective climate policy implementation. This is possibly a perennial challenge for long-term climate policy and is not unique to any country or region, although the specific dynamics can differ depending on the context. Several participants discussed some

successes generated combining climate objectives with other development goals that delivered immediate benefits to communities. Other ideas included developing institutions more resilient to political change, such as permanent committees or non-partisan bodies in charge with climate action.

Overall, the strong focus on governance was a key feature of this conference. While a range of technical issues persist, understanding how institutions are, or are not, working and continuing to experiment with institutional design was as an important area where efforts should continue going forward.



Theme 2 – Finance

Intimately connected to governance, finance was the second key cross-cutting theme emerging from the conference. This is hardly surprising given the relevance of the topic and its substantial challenges. As repeatedly noted elsewhere, the need of climate finance is important and its deployment will have to

increase significantly in order to catalyse the shifts required to address climate change. This is not a new message, and is not unique to this conference. But it does not mean that the issue is becoming less pressing. Some actions will require a substantial increase in financial support if they are to take off and be effective.



Conference participants identified several areas for which more finance is needed. In particular, finance was considered essential in conversations about:

- **South-South cooperation.** This has been suggested as a potentially useful pathway for the dissemination of best policy practices, as well as for learning and mobilisation, but finance has consistently been difficult to attain.
- **Diversification of recipients.** There has been growing interest in expanding the range of entities that can receive support through multilateral channels. For instance, cities and municipalities have a central role to play, and could become potential recipients of funds alongside or even instead of federal governments. Such diversification could be beneficial because these entities have a central role in policy

implementation. However, it poses challenges to the traditional finance model, due to capacity limitations within these organisations, and because of lack of experience of some large financial institutions in working with them. These difficulties suggest that capacity building and policy change should target financial institutions as well as local actors.

- **Programmatic support.** The conference confirmed the needs highlighted in other discussions on climate policy, including the importance of broad policy wide or programmatic support, rather than focusing on individual projects. This is not new either, but the persistence of the theme suggests that despite the widespread recognition of the difference it could make, it is not being addressed.

Specific Challenges



In addition to the two main overarching themes, the discussions revolved around the challenges of climate action in specific policy contexts. These touched particularly upon cities, land-use, trade and energy.

Theme 1 – Cities

Some of the most pressing issues facing countries, including in Latin America, derive from the overlap of increasing urbanisation and increasing impacts of climate change in urban environments. Climate change could exacerbate the vulnerabilities of urban dwellers, who are already enduring the challenges of rapid urbanisation. By targeting highly populated areas, urban policies have the power to significantly shape both climate mitigation and adaptation.

A core theme of the conference was understanding the challenges facing cities,

in particular those in the global South. Against this backdrop, participants discussed the strategies that are being, or could be, pursued to improve the protection of urban residents from existing and future climate-induced threats. As in other parts of the world, the range of actions already being taken by cities is remarkable. Activities discussed in the conference sessions were:

- **Nature-based adaptation.** Numerous examples of cities trying to move towards nature-based adaptation were highlighted. The driver of this

experimentation is the potential of such approaches to develop urban resilience with regard to water related climate extremes. This also allows to deal with the financial constraints often experienced by local governments and with the need to provide a myriad of 'co-benefits' to local populations. Specific examples of such activities included the restoration of conservation areas and peri-urban habitats, and the maintenance of ecosystems within urban centres.

- **Shift from disaster response to risk management.** Trying to encourage proactive planning that starts from the assessment of likely risks to urban populations and infrastructures was another element that emerged in this area. The analysis of urban vulnerabilities and the planning of long-term responses to climate change impacts was a strategy discussed at the meeting to enable action in the urban context.
- **Regional cooperation:** Working regionally was identified as a key need. There may be significant benefits for cities facing similar and connected challenges to work together, e.g. to share knowledge or analyses of common vulnerabilities. Transnational city networks, such as ICLEI's 'Cities for Climate Protection', was one of the cited examples, together with the 'Adapta Climata' network in Brazil, which a more regional initiative.

Theme 2 – Land Use

Concerns about land use were repeatedly highlighted during the conference. Regionally, this remains an essential component of climate policy, from both a mitigation and an adaptation perspective, on top of ongoing sustainable development efforts.

As discussed in relation to governance, the integration and coordination of policies is a pressing issue in this area. Depending on the context, there can be significant overlaps amongst authorities and a systemic lack of clarity about who, exactly, is responsible for what. This lack of clarity about responsibilities and the limited ability to hold institutions accountable associated to it, was linked to a range of governance challenges. Specifically, participants expressed concerns about the potential for corruption emerging from a lack of transparency about institutional roles. They also discussed the need of capacity building for state and local governments, as these institutions are often central in designing and implementing land use policies. The discussion ended with a call for further research to understand the actual dynamics of policy implementation across specific land-use contexts.



Theme 3 – Trade

There is long-standing concern about the need to understand the relationship between trade and climate change. In this session, participants focused on the institutional and legal challenges stemming from trade regulation. The discussion revolved especially around non-discrimination rules set by the World Trade Organization.

For example, for jurisdictions that intend to pursue climate mitigation efforts and protect their own industries, while also encouraging other jurisdictions to invest in low carbon development, border adjustments seem an appealing solution. However, not all such adjustments will work with WTO rules. As widely dis-

cussed, several complications emerge from potential conflicts between climate policy options – including border carbon adjustments – and non-discrimination in trade policies.

One avenue explored for further policy and academic enquiry was the potential for Sustainable Development Goal 12 (responsible production and consumption) to act as a framework for the integration of trade and climate concerns. Specifically, encouraging the use of full life-cycle analysis to understand and regulate the embodied emissions of products could be one way of managing tensions between trade and climate policy.

Similarly, setting international standards for embodied carbon, or other comparative metrics, could support jurisdictions in taking more aggressive climate action without triggering

trade disputes. For example, developing and using a global standard may help demonstrate non-discrimination in trade barriers a jurisdiction may impose.

Theme 4 – Energy

As is now widely acknowledged in literature and by communities worldwide, understanding how transitions towards low-carbon energy systems will interact with human development remains a central topic for analysis and policy advancement. While opportunities for ‘win-win’ scenarios could be created and pursued, several participants highlighted some of the challenges associated with efforts to implement low carbon strategies, especially with regard to renewable energy projects.

At the same time, as attention on low carbon energy pathways increases, moving to a cleaner future in a ‘just’ manner also attracts more scrutiny. Specifically, participants brought up concerns about the need to develop strategies to manage potential social conflict and inequity that could occur during such energy transition. Although some stakeholder groups, such as trade unions, have been discussing the need of just transitions for some time, this is increasingly becoming a pressing policy issue and an important area for further enquiry by policy-makers and academics.





Climate Strategies is an independent, not-for-profit organisation that aims to improve policy in the fields of climate change, energy and sustainable development by bridging the gap between decision-makers and researchers across Europe and internationally. It has three roles: Inspirer: To identify and test with stakeholders, funders and researchers new research topics, preferably multi-disciplinary and always with potential policy leverage; Convener: To find suitable and fundable topics for projects, conferences and other events where researchers and policy-makers can come together; and Translator: To interpret and publicly communicate research outputs so that they can be used by policy makers, business stakeholders and civil society



Freedom, justice and solidarity are the basic principles underlying the work of Konrad Adenauer Foundation - KAS, a political foundation linked to the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), a political party in Germany. With more than 80 offices abroad, and projects in over 120 countries, our goal is to make a unique contribution to the promotion of democracy, the rule of law, and a social market economy. Alongside to the country-specific programs, there are cross-border regional programs with separate thematic focuses. One of these programs, is the

KAS Regional Program "Energy Security and Climate Change in Latin America (EKLA)", which has its headquarters in Lima, Peru.



Iniciativa Climática de Mexico (ICM) supports climate action in Mexico and the country's efforts to be a global leader in mitigating climate change. ICM makes grants to support civil society and non-profit organizations, convenes decision-makers and other key stakeholders, produces technical research, and helps attract philanthropic resources to mitigate climate change in Mexico. ICM programs focus on decarbonizing the electricity sector, low-carbon transportation, and national climate policy.



The Institute for Climate and Society (iCS) is a philanthropic and re-granting organization that promotes prosperity, justice and low carbon development in Brazil. The Institute serves as a bridge between international and national funders and local partners. iCS belongs to a wide network of philanthropic organizations dedicated to building the solutions to the climate crisis. The Institute aims to enable the conditions and the architecture for society and decision makers to make informed choices about Brazil's development path, towards a prosper and climate safe future.

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Dr. Christian Hübner

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Regional Programme Energy Security and Climate Change in Latin America (EKLA),
Calle Cantuarias 160 Oficina 202 - Miraflores Lima 18
Peru | Energie-Klima-La@kas.de | +51 13 20 28 70



Andrzej Blachowicz

Climate Strategies, c/o WeWork Aldgate Tower,
2 Leman St, London E1 8FA, UK
www.climatestrategies.org

climatestrategies.org/gcpc-2018/