



# Multi-level governance of climate change adaptation through regional partnerships in Canada and England



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## ABSTRACT

Adaptation to climate change is widely recognized as a multi-level governance challenge because expected impacts and respective measures cut across governmental levels, sectors and societal domains. The present paper analyses the role of regional adaptation partnerships in Canada and England in the multi-level governance of climate change adaptation. We describe and compare three partnerships per country with regard to their evolution, membership and governing structures, coordination across levels and societal domains, and their adaptation activities and outputs. Although both partnership schemes represent new collaborative approaches, their genesis and governance differ. While the Canadian collaboratives are a government-centred approach that originated and partly operated top-down through a national programme for the period 2009–2012, the English partnerships follow a more pluralistic stakeholder-centred approach that evolved bottom-up already in the early 2000s. Both schemes have in common that they mediate between governmental levels, foster networking between public and private actors, and eventually build adaptive capacities and inform adaptation policies. We conclude that regional adaptation partnerships represent a new governance approach that facilitates climate change adaptation, albeit with limits. Since state actors play(ed) key roles in both partnership schemes, they do not represent a new sphere of authority outside the state. Instead of blurring or destabilizing governmental levels they complement (and perhaps even stabilise) them with multi-level interactions.

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## 1. Adaptation to climate change as a multi-level challenge

After two decades of climate change mitigation policies that failed to curb global greenhouse gas emissions and frequent signs of already changed climate patterns in many regions of the world (IPCC, 2007), climate change adaptation gained increasing attention among both policy-makers and scholars (Adger et al., 2007; Biesbroek et al., 2010). Adaptation to climate change challenges policy-making at international, national, regional and local levels in distinct ways (Adger et al., 2005, 78). Although climate change impacts such as sea level rise or extreme weather events show similar patterns across continents and countries their manifestations vary considerably at regional and local levels. As a consequence, climate change adaptation is widely understood as a multi-level endeavour that requires the coordination of different levels of government. Often, the following ‘political division of labour’ is implicitly or explicitly evoked in both scholarly literature and practical guidance. On the one hand, national governments (and supranational entities such as the European Commission) are expected to raise awareness, provide general frameworks

and guidance on how to adapt to climate change and co-fund adaptation projects. On the other hand, sub-national entities such as provinces and municipalities are identified as key actors when it comes to the detailed planning and implementation of adaptation policies (Corfee-Morlot et al., 2009; Galarraga et al., 2011; Keskitalo, 2010). Regions or provinces are expected to mediate between national and local actors because they are “strategic enough to establish links between all the different policy areas” (Galarraga et al., 2011, 168), and at the same time close enough to the local level for developing tailored solutions (Clar and Steurer, 2012; Corfee-Morlot et al., 2009, 31; Galarraga et al., 2011, 165). In addition, climate change adaptation concerns not only governmental authorities and public agencies but also civil society, businesses and individuals (Adger et al., 2005, 79). Governments are not only expected to facilitate adaptation among non-state actors, but they often also rely on the resources (including expertise) of the latter (Cimato and Mullan, 2010). Governance scholars consequently assume that effective adaptation to climate change requires new governance approaches that are able to bridge or even transcend governmental levels and societal domains (Adger et al., 2005; Bauer et al., 2012; Corfee-Morlot et al., 2009; Leck and Simon, 2013).

Partnerships denote such a new governance approach: they represent collaborative arrangements, usually between actors from two or more spheres of society (Glasbergen, 2007, 1f; Van Huijstee

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et al., 2007, 77). At the international level, partnerships exist mainly between developing and developed countries (for instance the Adaptation Partnership co-chaired by the United States, Spain and Costa Rica<sup>1</sup>). At national and subnational levels, most partnerships are public–private in character and have either a comparatively narrow (sectoral) focus (for instance between adaptation policy-makers and insurance companies in Germany and Norway) or a local scope (for instance in the Netherlands and in Australia). So far, comprehensive regional partnership schemes that encompass numerous regions in a country and address multiple sectors have emerged only in Canada and the UK (Bauer et al., 2012).

Based on an embedded case study design, the present paper analyses how three Regional Adaptation Collaboratives (RACs) in Canada and three Regional Climate Change Partnerships (RCCPs) in England facilitate climate change adaptation by coordinating activities across levels of government and societal domains. The selection of the partnerships was purposeful, i.e. we selected those that national policy-makers recommended as the most active ones. We accepted the loss of representativeness because the case selection helped us to unearth the potential of partnerships as new governance approaches. The case studies combine a document analysis (including reports, websites and material published by the partnerships) and a total of 19 semi-structured interviews with national policy-makers responsible for the support of the partnerships (three interviews), their managers (six interviews) and key partners (ten interviews).<sup>2</sup> The interviews, conducted between April and July 2011, were transcribed fully and analysed qualitatively.

The paper proceeds as follows: Section 2 discusses the analytical underpinnings of partnerships as new governance approaches. Sections 3 and 4 introduce the three Canadian RACs and the three English RCCPs respectively in terms of their evolution, membership structure, governance and activities. Section 5 compares and discusses the two partnership schemes with regard to their genesis, governance, coordination patterns, modes of governing and their roles in shaping adaptation. Section 6 concludes with a reflection on partnerships as new problem-solving instruments, as pluralistic environmental governance innovations and as post-scalar phenomena.

## 2. Partnerships as new governance approaches

The rise of ‘new governance’ or ‘network governance’ in recent decades stands for significant changes in how political decisions are taken and implemented. Although governments still have the prime responsibility for steering societies, they are increasingly dependent on the cooperation and joint resource mobilization of non-state actors (Börzel, 2011; Kooiman, 2003; Pierre, 2000; Pierre and Peters, 2000). Consequently, new governance arrangements (such as partnerships) often embody network-like relations between state, business and civil society (Bulkeley, 2005, 881; Glasbergen, 2007, 4; Steurer, 2013). In addition, many of them also operate at and across multiple levels or scales of government (Bulkeley, 2005, 881).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.adaptationpartnership.org>.

<sup>2</sup> Managers were asked about the origins, governance structure and activities of the partnerships. Key partners provided insights about how they became a partner, what their activities were within the partnership and how they benefitted from their involvement. National representatives were asked about their role and support in the partnerships and how they used the partnerships for their adaptation policies. All interviews addressed the relations between different actors, partnering benefits, and assessments of the strength, challenges and future of the partnerships.

<sup>3</sup> While the political science literature usually speaks of multi-level arrangements when referring to spatially bounded political units and the relations between them (see for instance Bache and Flinders, 2005; Hooghe and Marks, 2003; Keskitalo, 2010), the political geography literature uses the term multi-scalar (see for instance Benson, 2010; Bulkeley, 2005; Bulkeley and Betsill, 2013; Leck and Simon, 2013). We prefer the term ‘multi-level’ because we draw mainly on the concept of multi-level governance. The term ‘scale’ will be used synonymously when we refer to the political geography literature.

New governance approaches, most prominently networks and partnerships, are heavily promoted as vehicles for societal change in complex policy fields such as sustainable development (Forsyth, 2005; Glasbergen, 2007; Pattberg et al., 2012; Steurer, 2013; Van Huijstee et al., 2007) and climate change (Benson, 2010; Bulkeley, 2005; Bulkeley and Betsill, 2013; Dow et al., 2013; Hoffmann, 2011). Partnerships are defined as self-organizing, non-hierarchical alliances in which actors from one or multiple levels of government, the business domain and/or civil society pursue common goals by sharing resources, skills and risks (Glasbergen, 2007, 1f; Greve and Hodge, 2010, 9; Leach et al., 2002, 646; McQuaid, 2010, 128; Van Huijstee et al., 2007, 77).<sup>4</sup> Apart from these common characteristics, actual partnerships differ widely with regard to the themes addressed, their purpose, actor constellations and relations, spatial and temporal scope, funding, activities, outputs and their modes of governing (Glasbergen, 2007, 5; McQuaid, 2010, 127f; Van Huijstee et al., 2007, 77). When analysing the roles of partnerships in facilitating societal change, scholars usually focus on the “interactive structures and processes in which partnerships operate and the impacts of partnership activities on sustainability issues therein” (Glasbergen, 2011, 3). Our analysis of the adaptation partnerships in Canada and England is organized around the following five dimensions. First, partnerships are generally associated with a shift of responsibilities and authority between public and private actors and hence the role of various actor groups in the initiation of the partnerships is of particular interest. Partnerships may be set up top-down by (national) governments, or they may emerge bottom-up from the activities of businesses or societal actors.

Second, partnerships can include any number and combination of government, business and/or civil society actors both in their governance and in their activities. Accordingly, Glasbergen (2007, 5) distinguishes government-led partnerships from partnerships dominated by private parties, and ‘private partnerships’ between businesses and civil society organisations without government involvement (see also Steurer, 2013, who distinguishes public–private, private–private and tripartite partnerships, the latter involving all three societal domains).

A third analytical dimension concerns the coordination patterns of partnerships. Drawing on the multi-level governance literature, we distinguish between vertical and horizontal dimensions of coordination (Hooghe and Marks, 2003; Rosenau, 2005, 31). Vertical coordination is concerned with relations between two or more levels of government (local, regional, national), be they formal or informal, institutional, financial or informational (Hooghe and Marks, 2003; Pahl-Wostl, 2009, 358). Vertical coordination can occur in three ways: bottom-up when local initiatives influence national action, top-down when national frameworks influence local actors (Corfee-Morlot et al., 2009, 3), or reciprocal. Horizontal interactions can bridge the divides between different policy areas or sectors (Corfee-Morlot et al., 2009), between state and non-state actors (Glasbergen, 2011; Hooghe and Marks, 2003), or between regions or local authorities (Betsill and Bulkeley, 2006). Political geography scholars often contest the static conception of governmental levels as discrete units as well as the vertical hierarchy between them. Instead, they guide the analysis towards the processes and outcomes of how political scales are produced, reproduced and contested (Bulkeley, 2005, 897). They further highlight the “networked nature of social relations” (Bulkeley, 2005, 888) and the emergence of new political spaces as post-scalar or post-territorial phenomena (Benson, 2010; Bulkeley and Betsill, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> While partnerships are generally characterised as formalized collaborations, networks are conceptualized in diverse ways. In some cases networks are understood as partnership-like governance arrangements, in other cases networks denote a particular mode of governance that complements hierarchies and markets (see below).

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