

Why Do Global Cities Engage with Global Climate Governance? The Case Studies of Shanghai and Chicago

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ABSTRACT

As climate change intensifies, cities-particularly global cities-are emerging as critical players in addressing its challenges. Rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and other climate-related impacts threaten urban areas, compelling cities to take action. This article explores the motivations behind global cities' engagement in global climate governance, focusing on both internal and external drivers. Using Chicago and Shanghai as case studies, the research investigates how cities' roles as policy implementers, combined with the pursuit of political and economic gains, push them to the forefront of climate leadership. Externally, the inability of international negotiations to make significant progress, along with gaps in the global governance system, compels cities to intervene and address these shortcomings. By analyzing these dynamics, the paper highlights the growing importance of cities as influential actors in global climate governance and emphasizes their unique capacity to drive climate action.

KEYWORDS

Global Cities; Climate Governance; Non-State Actors; Policy Implementation; Political Economy.

1. INTRODUCTION

Climate change is becoming an increasingly serious issue, with rising sea levels threatening the security of coastal cities and extreme weather events such as droughts and floods increasing the vulnerability of marginal urban populations. Metropolitan areas can be victims of the effects of climate change, while the city and its inhabitants should also be responsible for taking action to mitigate its effects. Although the global climate governance system is still being led by states, non-state actors such as NGOs, sub-state actors, and multinational corporations are gradually gaining influence in global environmental governance. In contrast to states, cities, as representatives of key sub-state actors, are at the final stage of climate policy implementation and thus play a unique role in global climate governance.

As globalization accelerates and transnational economic exchanges become more frequent, a new phenomenon, the global city, has emerged. Global cities are cities that have control and influence over global politics, economics, and culture in the context of globalization, and occupy important strategic nodes [1,2]. They have dominant power over transnational trade that ordinary cities do not have, and form a network of transnational cities parallel to national systems, such as the C40 and Cities for Climate Protection (CCP) Program. Since the Paris Agreement, the global climate governance system has embraced a new 'bottom-up' paradigm, emphasizing the critical role of non-state actors in global climate governance. Global cities are the type of cities that are responsible for global climate change while also having the resources and capacity to engage with the global climate governance agenda.

Therefore, the paper will focus on the main research question why do global cities engage with global climate governance? What, specifically, are the internal and external drivers of global cities' participation in global climate governance? The following section discusses the internal and external motivation respectively, and the two cases of Shanghai and Chicago will be compared. In the conclusion, we believe that the following factors affect the participation of global cities' participation in global climate governance. First, cities' role as policy implementers urges them to participate in global climate governance; Second, political interests and economic gains drive cities to engage with global climate governance; Third, gaps in the global climate governance system need to be filled by non-state actors such as cities; Fourth, the international climate negotiation dilemma is forcing cities to be involved in global climate governance.

2. THE MOTIVATIONS AND DRIVERS OF CITIES' PARTICIPATION IN GLOBAL CLIMATE GOVERNANCE

2.1. Internal Motivation of Global Cities' Participation in Global Climate Governance

Cities' role as policy implementers urges them to participate in global climate governance. Cities are the main battleground for addressing climate change as well as the forefront of the negative impacts of climate change and, more importantly, the direct implementers of climate policy. Bulkeley and Betsill (2005) point out that cities are the sites of high energy consumption and will certainly play a crucial role in future actions to address climate change [3]. Due to the high density of population, economy, and facilities, cities are also subject to greater and more severe social, economic, and physical threats than other regions when faced with extreme climate events such as sea level rise, heat waves, and flooding caused by climate change. Therefore, the vulnerability of cities to climate change thus gives cities a stronger incentive to participate in global climate governance. In addition, cities are the practical implementers of national climate policies. Any international and national climate policy ultimately has to be implemented at the local level for concrete implementation.

Participating in global climate governance brings city leaders more political gain. Cities that act as leaders in global environmental governance do so out of a desire for international recognition [4]. Progressive and green environmental policies are a necessary condition for cities to be considered global cities. One of the important and direct ways for city leaders to intervene in global climate governance is to join various forms of coalitions related to global climate governance, which allows them to share their successful experiences in urban climate governance, defend the interests of their cities and ensure their cities' environmental security. Furthermore, it can increase the exposure of mayors to the national and international community, and cultivate the image of "green" mayors for electoral purposes to add leverage to their career advancement, more importantly, as a way to make their climate policy positions known to their countries. Among these mayors, without a doubt, mayors of global cities receive the most attention, have the most responsibility, and are the most competent.

2.2. External Drivers of Global Cities' Participation in Global Climate Governance

The international climate negotiation dilemma is forcing cities to be involved in global climate governance. The climate negotiation process has struggled as the problem of climate change becomes more serious, and the Kyoto Protocol and the Bali Roadmap have not made any significant progress. Although the Paris Agreement established a new pattern of "bottom-up" climate governance, tangible progress has yet to be seen. In short, international climate negotiations are generally slow, and the outcomes are unsatisfactory. It is worth noting that the above-mentioned documents continue to emphasize sovereign states' responsibility, and the international community generally believes that state behavior is the most important cause of global climate change, while ignoring cities as direct victims of climate change and direct implementers of climate policy. The responsibility of cities is not included in a series of important documents and consensus under the UN climate change

framework, which means that cities are excluded from the UN climate change negotiation framework. In addition, the consensus and documents reached in the interstate climate change negotiations could not be fully harmonized with the city's regulatory system. Sassen (2010) emphasizes cities have been forced to develop the capacity to respond to challenges before international treaties are signed between countries or countries adopt legislation to address global challenges [5]. In some special cases, cities may not want to be overly bound by international conventions or national laws, or even violate national laws. The dilemma is forcing global cities to engage directly in global climate governance, and one of the most effective ways to do so is to join a transnational network of cities that cooperate institutionally.

Gaps in the global climate governance system need to be filled by non-state actors such as cities. Global climate governance currently has gaps. A variety of factors contribute to the global climate governance gap. One factor is the lack of political will or commitment to addressing climate change at the international level. Some countries may be more focused on their own economic or political interests. The current global governance system requires countries to transform from high-pollution and high-emission economic production patterns to green economic production methods. However, since the economic transformation will have a threefold effect on developing countries' production methods, fiscal balances, and even political systems. As a result, global climate governance has emerged as an important tool for developed countries to use in order to constrain developing countries. This demonstrates that the inter-state game of global governance is fundamentally about pursuing and maintaining national interests, and clearly, national interests continue to take precedence over global interests.

On the one hand, developing countries do not want to accelerate the transition to a low-carbon economy at the expense of their national interests. On the other hand, developed countries hope to force developing countries to accelerate their transition through climate governance mechanisms, such as setting high carbon emission standards and imposing carbon tariffs, only to have developing countries pay for them and take advantage of the transition period of developing countries so as to continue to maintain the old international order dominated by developed countries. Another factor that contributes to the gap in global climate governance is the lack of effective mechanisms for implementing and enforcing international agreements and commitments. The current international mechanism is ineffective in dealing with global warming [6]. The orchestration of global urban climate governance: Conducting power in the post-Paris climate regime. Many countries have made commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adopt more sustainable development practices, but holding countries accountable for meeting these commitments can be difficult.

Therefore, the gap in global climate governance requires the intervention of effective actors. As direct victims of climate change and implementers of climate policies, cities are effective actors that should step into the global climate governance gap to improve the global climate governance mechanism. And global cities are more likely to intervene in global climate governance than other cities, because the benefits of the former are likely to be greater than the latter. First, global cities can attract more immigrants and sustain their dynamism by becoming involved in global climate governance. By joining transnational urban climate networks, global cities can effectively reduce environmental pollution and enhance their climate resilience through projects related to resilient cities and green infrastructure. Humans frequently choose to migrate to avoid climate and environmental degradation and live in global cities with better environments due to concerns about climate and environmental security. Furthermore, the presence of multinational corporations and other high-end industries in global cities can attract high-class migrants, while the low- and mid-range service industries attached to them provide job opportunities for low-class migrants, making global cities a natural magnet for migrants. Active participation in global climate governance can provide a steady flow of talent for global city development and keep global city economies dynamic. Second, because global cities no longer depend on highly polluting industries for their development, they will shift sources of pollution that do not fit their development strategies to other cities within the country. Since the environmental

standards and industrial technology level of global cities are often higher than those of the receiving cities, the pollution sources of global cities are not necessarily the pollution sources of the receiving cities, and the taking over of such sources often drives the economic development of the receiving cities. This process is entirely beneficial to the global city and both beneficial and detrimental to the city taking over the pollution.

3. THE CASE OF CHICAGO AND SHANGHAI

According to Global Cities Index (GCI), Chicago and Shanghai are among the top 20 global cities due to their strong political and economic influence. As representatives of two cities from the global South and the North, both Chicago and Shanghai are actively involved in global climate governance.

Chicago is one of the pioneers of climate action in the U.S. From the start of its environmental journey in 1989 to the launch of the Chicago Climate Action Plan in 2008, Chicago has not only strengthened climate cooperation within the region but also focused on climate cooperation with national and international efforts. It has participated in international initiatives to address climate change, including the Clinton Climate Initiative, ICLEI, the Center for Clean Air Policy City Leaders, the U.S. Conference of Mayors, and C40, to learn from and share successful experiences in climate action.

As China's international influence grows, it is becoming more involved in global climate governance. However, in comparison to cities in the United States and Europe, though Chinese cities are lagging, they are still actively exploring new initiatives for global climate governance cooperation. Through the establishment of the Shanghai Environmental Energy Exchange, Shanghai is promoting its carbon neutrality goal. In addition, Shanghai joined the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Alliance in 2005 and launched the world's first transpacific green shipping corridor in 2022 with the cooperation between the Port of Los Angeles, Port of Shanghai, and C40 Cities to achieve clean, low-carbon inbound cargo transportation.

After the United States withdrew from the Paris Agreement, Chicago, a global city, was one of the first cities to protest. Mayor Emanuel stated that he would continue to abide by the Paris Agreement's goal of reducing carbon emissions. In addition, Chicago also hosted the first North American Climate Summit, which brought mayors from nearly 50 of the world's major cities together to discuss climate issues. The above actions show that cities leader can express their left stance on climate issues to the country by joining urban alliances. And international influence and the image of cities can be enhanced through participation in transnational climate governance networks [7]. Also, a good example to support my claims would be Mauricio Macri, the former president of Argentina acting as the mayor of Buenos Aires from 2007 to 2015. During his tenure as mayor, he actively promoted many progressive environmental policies, which earned him a positive reputation and helped him win the presidential election in 2015. Thus, participation in global climate governance enables mayors to build good reputations and achieve job advancement and policy advocacy using the environment as leverage for political purpose.

However, these benefits could be country, or even region, specific. For city leaders from China, involvement in climate governance is driven primarily by central government pressure for environmental protection performance assessment and the requirement for top-bottom coordination arrangements. Electoral benefits and policy advocacy do not apply to explain the behavior of China's global city leaders. China has developed a model of “top-down monitoring and bottom-up feedback” for environmental protection policy, and the effectiveness of environmental policy implementation directly affects the future development of local officials [8]. For instance, in May 2018, Shanghai released the “Rectification Report of Shanghai on Implementing Feedback from the Central Environmental Protection Inspection”, which proposed the establishment of a leading group headed by the mayor for the rectification and reform of the Central Environmental Protection Inspection in Shanghai. Major issues arising from the inspection and assessment are to be reported to

the CPC Central Committee, and the results of the inspection are to be transferred to the Organization Department of the CPC Central Committee. This has led city leaders to take climate change and environmental governance seriously.

Global cities have an economic interest in addressing climate change and their traditional attributes as financial centers in a globalized economy make them a place for investment in climate change-related industries [9,10,11]. A great deal of financial interaction and investment with climate change, carbon trading markets, and energy-efficient technologies is taking place within global cities, and global cities are thereby reaping significant economic benefits. One of the key objectives of C40 member cities is to pool purchasing power to reduce the price of building materials, equipment production and delivery costs. The Coalition for Urban Transitions pointed out that low-carbon cities can reduce carbon emissions while providing a large number of economic opportunities. Investing in 16 low-carbon measures in cities can reduce urban carbon emissions by 90% by 2050, with a net present value of 24 trillion US dollars. In addition, active involvement in climate governance can lead to significant job creation for the city and thus sustained green economic growth. Specific measures in the five strategies of the Chicago Climate Action Plan (e.g., installing home renewable electricity equipment, composting, etc.) have provided many green jobs in Chicago. Therefore, the enormous economic benefits are attracting cities around the world to participate in global climate governance.

4. CONCLUSION

The analysis of global cities' participation in climate governance reveals that both internal and external factors drive their engagement. Internally, cities' roles as policy implementers and their exposure to climate risks make climate governance not just a responsibility, but a necessity for sustaining urban resilience. Cities like Chicago and Shanghai exemplify how global cities leverage political and economic incentives-whether through gaining international recognition or promoting green industries and job creation-to deepen their involvement in climate initiatives.

Externally, the inability of international climate negotiations to deliver swift results, coupled with gaps in global governance frameworks, forces cities to take a more prominent role. By joining transnational networks like C40, cities can influence global climate policy independently of their national governments, gaining political leverage and enhancing their international standing. However, the motivations differ based on political context: while Chicago's participation is driven by local political ambitions and international prestige, Shanghai's involvement is more closely tied to national government pressure and strategic environmental goals.

Ultimately, this study underscores the critical role of global cities in bridging the governance gaps left by nation-states and positions them as indispensable actors in the fight against climate change. The findings suggest that understanding the specific drivers behind city-level engagement in global climate governance can offer valuable insights for strengthening multi-level governance frameworks, ensuring more effective and comprehensive climate action.

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