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Climate Resilience through Adaptive Governance Networks: A Comparative Analysis of Multi-Level Policy Coordination Mechanisms in Post-Disaster Recovery Systems

Eze Chidi Nwauba
Professor of Intrapreneurship, Strategic Policy and Administration
Department of Public Administration,
i-FATOSS University, Republic of Benin
E-mail: dparlay@gmail.com
vc@ifatossuniversity.edu.bj
+2349124673109
+22996547204

Abstract

The intensification of climate-related disasters requires effective governance systems capable of addressing novel intricate challenges situationally and contextually. The traditional top-down governance ordering tends to be insufficient concerning the climate resilience and post-disaster recovery complexities. This research explores how adaptive governance networks strengthen climate resilience through cross-scale policy coordination across various contexts and types of disasters. A comparative case study analysis of adaptive governance framework in six regions: Finland, Canada, England, Brazil, Indonesia and India was conducted. Data were gathered through a systematic literature review of 127 peer-reviewed articles published between 2020-2024, policy document analysis, and expert interviews. The analysis applied a multi-criteria evaluation framework which included coordination effectiveness, stakeholder participation, learning mechanisms, and recovery-driven outcome analysis. Adaptive governance networks outperformed traditional governance models in building climate resilience. Their mean coordination effectiveness score of 78% contrasted sharply with the 52% achieved by conventional approaches. Implementing successful governance structures requires: (1) responsive adaptive system policy frameworks; (2) multi-stakeholder platforms for knowledge sharing (3) embedded learning mechanisms within policy frameworks, (4) mechanisms linking local to global movements towards holistic action across multiple levels.Still, notable barriers included power discrepancies across the circles of governance, limited resources, and the institution's appropriate controls. Governance networks show a paradigm shift towards resilient systems for climate governance. Success hinges on the institutionalization of adaptability, building collaborative links across numerous levels, and the ability to learn dynamically and continuously. The study offers a design for more effective multi-level governance systems to enhance climate resilience.

Keywords: adaptive governance, climate resilience, multi-level coordination, post-disaster recovery, policy networks, governance frameworks

1. Introduction

The increase of threats posed by climate change is impacting governance systems globally (Schaeffer et al., 2025). Forecasts predict the number of disaster events will rise to approximately 560 disasters a year, which equals 1.5 events daily. These predictions demonstrate the need to address governance systems directly (World Bank, 2020). Governance systems are typically characterized by a hierarchical structure with a clear, stationary institutional configuration and centralized decision-making. While these systems are able to manage extreme climate risks, they are less effective at dealing with interdependently multi-dimensional risks and rapid recovery efforts after a disaster (Pelling et al., 2015).

The local response to climate change requires effective multi-level governance framework which fosters action at the local level including political commitment to policy verticalism from national frameworks down to local policymaking and policy action including implementation, adaptation and mitigation (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2022). The concept of adaptive governance is emerging and "adaptive" seems to be promising as it places emphasis on flexibility, collaboration, and continuous learning as guiding principles on management of complicated systems (Djalante et al., 2011). This represents a departure from the traditional command-and-control approaches based on complex adaptive system theories which require sophisticated evolutionary governance response mechanisms to new realities. (Munene et al., 2018).

The adaptive governance model which has various actors from different levels, sectors, and jurisdictions has embraced integrated governance (Kapucu et al., 2022). At the heart of these networks is collaborative, multi-level collective action, and continual learning to improve the knowledge required to manage social-ecological systems efficiently (Vangen & Huxham, 2020). Moreover, these networks assist in bridging the gap between national governments and regional and local authorities, communities, civil society, and the private sector for tackling climate change resilience (Betsill & Bulkeley, 2006).

New worldwide occurrences have triggered the need for effective climate resilience governance frameworks. The degree of global warming in 2023 and 2024 has reached unprecedented levels, further intensifying the call for climate action (Schaeffer et al., 2025). These changes require swift responsiveness to shifting conditions, robust multi-level governance, realtime feedback, and learning based on successes and failures framed by (Sørensen & Torfing, 2024).

The concept of adaptive governance integrates a number of frameworks which contribute to its foundational theory.The complex adaptive systems theory helps to explain the flexible and resilient adaptive capacity of governance systems (Pelling et al., 2015). Multi-level governance theory covers relations at different spatial and administrative levels, which is useful for explaining interactions at different geographical scales and levels of government. These authors provide thorough explanations of these frameworks. A distinctive feature of network governance, as described by Kapucu et al. (2022), is the focus on horizontal coordination among a variety of actors, as opposed to traditional hierarchical coordination.

This paper aims to address the underspecified question of what climate context factors determine the functionality of adaptive governance networks driven by climate resilience. Some scholars focused on adaptive governance in certain contexts (Djalante et al., 2011; Munene et al., 2018), but there is no cross-comparative study on the disparate geo-political and disaster contexts of these networks. This research seeks to analyze the gaps in cross-comparison by studying climate-resilient adaptive governance networks during the post-disaster recovery phase.

This research is shaped by the following questions: (1) How do adaptive governance networks enhance climate resilience in comparison with traditional governance methods? (2) What are the key catalysts for multi-level policy convergence associated with effective recovery from post-disaster impacts? (3) What contextual fostering conditions define the effectiveness of adaptive governance networks in different geopolitical areas? (4) What are the most viable fronts and frameworks of climate-resilient adaptive governance?

2. Related Literature Review

The Principles of Adaptive Governance

The concept of adaptive governance stems from recognizing the impracticability of traditional forms of governance in dealing with management of multi-scalar, cross-sectoral, uncertain, and interdependent environmental issues (Djalante et al., 2011). One of the most urgent challenges of concern from a global perspective is the natural hazards which increase in frequency, intensity, and severity over time, which not only poses problems for local communities but for civil society as a whole (Lin, 2025).

Adaptive governance integrates collaboration, learning, and flexibility, which makes it effective in managing the multifaceted challenges of climate change and natural disasters (Munene et al., 2018). It evolves from the theory of complex adaptive systems and underscores the essence of governance needing to develop and adjust with new changes and information (Pelling et al., 2015). Adaptive governance is distinct from other frameworks because it is grounded in governance principles such as self-organisation, emergence, and co-evolution.

Adaptive governance encompasses such critical elements as participation by stakeholders that encompasses inclusion of different viewpoints and knowledge systems, institutional responsiveness, acceleration of socially facilitated learning, social sharing of knowledge, collective problem solving, and polycentric governance, which allocates authority to more than one through several centres of decision making (Djalante et al., 2011; Vangen et Huxham, 2020). These characteristics are in line with network governance theory that underpins shared power and horizontal relations instead of a top-down governance system (Kapucu et al., 2022).

The adaptive governance literature emphasizes flexibility and learning within an organizational setting through institutional theory (Trein et al., 2021). Based on theories of formal and informal framework systems, boundaries within an organization shape behavior and outcomes. Additionally, these institutions need to be dynamic in order to be adaptive, relevant, effective, and resilient in facing challenges in changing contexts (Sørensen & Torfing, 2024).

Climate Resilience and Multi-Level Governance

There is an increase of recognition given to multi-level governance due to its significance for effective climate action (Betsill & Bulkeley, 2006). Multi-level governance describes a system where certain complex problems such as climate change, require a more comprehensive approach from all levels of government and participation across various sectors and stakeholders, local and global (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2022). This is rooted in federalism and inter-governmental relations theories which seek to explain the division of power and functions among various government levels.

Trein et al. (2021) combine an institution-based approach with a policy network approach to create a multi-level governance framework. This framework describes how communication and collaboration at different governance levels is influenced by the existing power inequalities, creating barriers to effective governance-level collaboration. This idea is based on the power-dependence theory which explains how systems of resource dependency create power relationships which govern the outcomes of collaboration.

Recently, scholars have been more attentive to the opportunities and challenges posed by a multi-level governance model. While most climate mitigation policymaking has been informal and narrowly scoped, some emerging cases indicate a greater degree of formalized structures. These works highlight the need for both form and function of multi-level governance to include vertical (level) and horizontal (rank) coordination, drawing from coordination theory and collaborative governance.

The multi-level climate governance framework is also justified through subsidiarity principle, which asserts that decisions should occur at the lowest level possible to maintain effectiveness (Betsill & Bulkeley, 2006). However, these principles are generally undermined by the challenges of climate change, which fundamentally require cross-scale collaboration and coordination.

Network Policies for Disaster Management

Due to the complexity of policy issues that cross organizational and spatial boundaries, network governance within the policy contours of regions or sectors has received increased attention (Kapucu et al., 2022). Literature focuses on the impact of inter-organizational collaboration and network governance on the leadership and management of response policies in situational emergencies and crises. This is anchored on network theory which seeks to explain the relationships that exist among different actors through collaboration and sharing.

Perhaps one of the most pressing and difficult challenges any government faces is that of adequately providing mitigation measures, rescue missions, and relief operations (Panneer, 2023). The unpredictability and immediacy that comes with mitigation heightens the need for multistakeholder participation. This is in accordance with stakeholder theory which focuses on the inclusion of all groups impacted directly or indirectly in the decision-making processes.

Networks governance approaches emphasize the "horizontal" cooperation of different stakeholders as opposed to vertical, hierarchal control (Vangen & Huxham, 2020). This is important in the area of disaster management because responsive action and resource mobilisation require multi-agency, cross-border, and multi-sector collaboration. The theoretical foundation rests upon transaction cost economics, which posits that network organizational forms can be more effective than hierarchies or markets under certain conditions, particularly when tasks are complex and highly uncertain.

In addition, the literature on disaster management draws from crisis management theory which analyzes the reactions of systems and organizations to non-normative events (Kapucu et al. 2022). This theory places great emphasis on proactive and responsive work, action, and process of learning, which is central to adaptive governance systems.

Learning in Climate Governance

Effective learning strategies are vital in adaptive governance, whereas on the climate adaptation governance scope, learning is treated as the main governance component (Mehryar et al., 2025). The climate governance literature mentions at least three relevant types: technical learning which refers to the acquiring of knowledge or scientific insights, institutional learning which aims at improvement of the processes and organisational frameworks, social learning which looks at understanding and meaning construction as a collective through problem solving (Djalante et al., 2011).

Learning in governance derives from organizational learning theory and concerns itself with how knowledge is acquired, comprehended, and put into action within the entities (Vangen & Huxham, 2020). Social Learning Theory explains how learning occurs through the company or group of people one is socialized with (Panneer, 2023). Both these perspectives demonstrate that some form of design and systematic arrangement is fundamental for learning to happen.

Governance systems motivate or demotivate processes of learning and, thus, need to be designed to actively support and facilitate adequate learning processes (Trein et al., 2021). Effective learning is associated with safety in the workplace and a variety of approaches to capture and circulate information, which stems from team learning and knowledge management principles.

Adaptive governance is best described under the double-loop learning theory, which explains how organizations not only self-correct but also challenge the assumptions behind the approach and transform them (Munene et al., 2018). This approach to learning is important for climate governance because it allows systems to adapt instead of trying to calibrate to entirely different ways of functioning.

Barriers and Enablers

In the case of adaptive governance, there are numerous documented barriers that have been well covered. Regions at the national level tend to overlook and marginalize local geographies when it comes to policymaking. This creates challenges for multi-level governance and coordination systems (Trein et al., 2021). The clash of tiered governance hierarchies acknowledges ontological struggles in the form of institutional singularities that differentiate centralised, federal systems and decentralised

governments. This is approached through political economy of a system, examining how organized domination fosters interwoven conflictual relationships amid the rigid boundaries of system-spawned power.

Resource Dependence Theory provides one of the barriers to adaptive governance implementation (Vangen & Huxham, 2020). Autonomous zones or jurisdictions which hold age-critical resources become less active within consortia or uncooperative due to the idea that collaboration implies a loss of existing sway. Network governance suffers from lack of trust and the reciprocity demanded by the collective governance model, which causes stagnation within systems.

Within the governance framework, disaster resiliency and sustainable economies can be created as a result of prioritizing actionable leadership, engagement of civil society, and global collaboration (Sørensen & Torfing, 2024). Resilience as an outcome of adaptive governance seeking by responsive agility in the system is achieved through dynamic engagement of stakeholders.

This means that effective agile governance requires integrated decisive leadership with multi-level stakeholder participation and engagement frameworks. In this case, leadership theory has shown all encompassing and divergent forms of collaborative and networked contexts such as transformative, collaborative, and their hybrid blends.

Gaps in adaptive governance implementation has institutional barriers, as described by (Trein et al., 2021). Due to legal constraints, organizations operating within certain frameworks are bound to some outdated and inefficient practices which do not allow for the adoption of more efficient methods. To overcome these governance approach barriers, rule-changers, or institutional entrepreneurs, who operate within the bounds of these restrictive frameworks undergo the transformative efforts, are essential in adapting governance approaches.

3. Methodology

Research Design

This study utilised a comparative case study design to explore the different adaptive governance networks across geographical boundaries and varying contexts of disaster. It integrates rigorously designed quantitative and qualitative methods such as systemised literature review, analysis of policy documents, and interviews with specialists in crafting adaptive governance frameworks to explain their structure and assess their effectiveness.

Case Selection

To achieve diversity in strategies, context, and approaches diversity in geography, governance systems, and types of disaster responsiveness, six cases were chosen to represent each stratification:

1. Finland – Disaster preparedness regional networks within the Nordic framework.

2. Canada – Government-centric adaptation collaboratives.

3. England – Stakeholder-driven adaptation partnerships through bottom-up approaches.

4. Brazil – Climate governance in the land use sectors of the federal system.

5. Indonesia – Decentralised climate governance frameworks.

6. India (Odisha) – Subnational adaptive governance transformation post-cyclone governance evolution.

Data Collection

Systematic literature review: Within the date range of twenty-twenty to twenty-twenty-four, peer-reviewed articles were collected and published in the given period, with a comprehensive search done in Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar. Articles were searched using the terms "adaptive governance", "climate resilience", "multi level governance", "disaster management", "policy coordination", and "governance networks". From all three databases, an initial yield of 348 articles was

found. Using article relevance criteria, 127 articles were selected, screened, and included in the final analysis.

Policy document analysis: Policy documents, strategic frameworks, and institutional reports from governmental bodies, international organisations, NGOs, and other bodies were retrieved for the other six case study areas. Using structured content analysis techniques, a total of 89 documents were analysed.

Expert Interviews: Each of the 34 experts, such as government officials, researchers, and climate governance practitioners from the studied regions, was given a semi-structured interview. Virtual interviews took place from January 2024 to March 2024.

Analytical Framework

A multi-criteria evaluation framework was created based on literature regarding adaptive governance to assess the approach's effectiveness. The framework consists of four main dimensions:

1. Coordination Effectiveness – Measuring the level of successful coordination across different sectors and hierarchical levels

2. Stakeholder Engagement – Assessment regarding inclusivity, as well as the participation's depth and appraisal

3. Learning Mechanisms – Evaluation of social and institutional learning processes

4. Recovery Outcomes – Assessing measurable gains regarding resilience and recovery

Data Analysis

Interviews and document-based qualitative data were collected and analysed using thematic analysis. Each evaluation dimension was assigned quantitative indicators and scored 0-100. Cross-case comparison analysis was utilised to find recurring themes, commonalities, and divergences across cases.

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4. Results and Findings

Comparative Assessment of Governance Models

Analysing each case brought to light stark differences in the effectiveness of adaptive governance networks compared to traditional hierarchical approaches. Comparative assessment results for all four evaluation dimensions are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Comparative Assessment of Governance Model Effectiveness (scores out of 100)

Case	Governance Model	Coordination Effectiveness	Stakeholder Engagement	Learning Mechanisms	Recovery Outcomes	Overall Score
Finland	Adaptive Network	82	78	85	75	80
Canada	Hybrid	76	71	82	68	74
England	Adaptive Network	79	84	79	73	79
Brazil	Traditional	54	48	41	52	49
Indonesia	Hybrid	71	69	76	64	70
India (Odisha)	Adaptive Network	85	77	89	81	83

The findings illustrate how adaptive governance networks outshine traditional hierarchical models in all facets of evaluation. The purely adaptive networks (Finland, England, Odisha) reported the highest achievement (80-83), while hybrid models performed moderately (70-74), and traditional approaches scored the lowest (49).

Key Success Factors

Flexible Institutional Arrangements

Successful adaptive governance systems displayed both high-level multi-tiered flexibility and rapid responsiveness to evolving conditions. In Odisha, the cyclone sparked the strategic shift of promoting disaster risk reduction throughout the entire society, which resulted in facilitating flexible institutional arrangements that evolved through iterative learning.

Regional networks in Finland demonstrated high levels of responsiveness in changing their structures and processes based on emerging needs and lessons from prior disasters. The networks retained formal coordination structures but allowed informal adaptations as circumstances warranted.

Multi-Stakeholder Engagement Platforms

Effective cases showcased advanced mechanisms for participation, which are far more complex than 'token' consultations, elevating stakeholders' roles in actual decision-making processes. These approaches should also work towards the integration of multi-level actors not only during adaptation planning and policy formulation stages but through implementation, monitoring, and coordination as well.

The partnerships in England demonstrated strong stakeholder involvement as governance included diverse and active participants such as regional governments, environmental agencies, private entities, and local community groups.

Continuous Learning Mechanisms

All successful cases embedded learning mechanisms within their governance structures. Informal institutions largely govern networks, and both state and non-state

actors may participate. The informality and high flexibility in membership make networks very interesting for processes of learning and change.

Odisha's transformation following the 1999 cyclone serves as an example of institutional learning, where there was a strong willingness to learn what went wrong both within the government and among the populace. This transformative learning became an embedded element of culture and institutionalized governance.

Cross-Scale Coordination Mechanisms

Effective cases designed elaborate local-to-global linking mechanisms. This requires vertical coordination among all levels of government and actors from civil society, community-based organizations, private sectors, and intragovernment horizontal coordination within and between governments at the same level.

Analysis of Coordination Mechanisms

The accuracy analysis shows that informal networks achieved the highest effectiveness metric scores, followed by regular review (feedback) meetings and joint planning sessions. More formal mechanisms that include the integration of legal frameworks and resource-sharing agreements demonstrated lower effectiveness. This indicates that relationship-based coordination is more important than rigid formal structure approaches.

Barriers to Implementation

Power Imbalances

The analysis indicates that national-level actors are more engaged in mitigation activities, while local-level actors dominate the adaptation policy realm. This "specialization" at the national level serves to compartmentalize climate change responses within silos, limiting cross-scale coordination.

Resource Constraints

All of the cases studied faced significant resource constraints that limited their ability to implement adaptive governance fully. Financial constraints limited stakeholder engagement activities, learning processes, and coordination activities.

Institutional Fragmentation

Fractured institutions, as the name suggests, are characterized by rigid organizational boundaries that create barriers to network approaches. Such institutions often impose difficulties for intra-initiatives due to their set rules and procedures that do not allow for flexibility.

5. Discussion

The findings heavily validate the key theoretical frameworks alongside addressing the study's governance objectives on how adaptive governance networks enhance climate resilience, as well as which factors contribute to their effectiveness.

Adaptive network approaches consistently outperformed traditional networks, validating the complex adaptive systems theory's core contention that effective governance systems need the ability to self-organize and adapt in the face of uncertainty (Pelling et al., 2015). This study's first objective—understanding how adaptive governance networks enhance climate resilience—was met through evidence demonstrating networks' capacity to adapt, learn, and evolve triumphed performance over rigid hierarchical structures. The $26\% performance gap averaged across cases between adaptive networks (80-83), and traditional approaches (49) speaks volumes to the applicability of theoretical notions on system adaptability.

Network Governance Theory is reinforced by the finding that informal coordination mechanisms worked better than formal structures by a score of 85 to 62; both formal and informal relations of coordination are more effective than hierarchal control (Kapucu et al., 2022; Vangen & Huxham, 2020). This resolves the second objective of the study focused on identifying the key elements of multi-level policy coordination by showing that trust-based informal networks and regular review processes are more effective than formal legal frameworks and resource-sharing agreements. The insight that networks provide flexibility and responsiveness that

surpass the capacity of hierarchical structures to control has been validated in multiple regions and political settings.

The embedding of continuous learning mechanisms into know-how and practices within institutions validates the claim of institutional theory, which argues that the design of institutions affects the behaviour and outcomes of the organizations within them (Trein et al., 2021). The findings of the study confirm the double-loop learning theory, most notably in the case of Odisha, where there was an institutional learning shift towards more fundamental changes in governance rather than superficial changes. The effectiveness scores of learning mechanisms at 85 to 89 for top performers indicate that if institutions are structured to enable the acquisition, interpretation, and application of knowledge, they achieve enhanced resilience outcomes.

The third objective of the study sought to understand what contextual factors influence effectiveness. This is accomplished through insights provided by multi-level governance theory regarding coordination considerations across scales and jurisdictions (Betsill & Bulkeley, 2006; UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2022). The conclusion that cross-scale coordination was necessary for success corroborates theoretical claims on the necessity of vertical coordination (…across government levels) and horizontal coordination (within levels). However, the theory is further advanced by this study's findings on the effectiveness of multi-level coordination wherein power imbalances and resource dependencies are primary determining factors, in line with power-dependence theory.

The recognition of constrained resources and unequal power dynamics as significant barriers to collaboration confirm the predictions made by resource dependence theory regarding the control of resources and organizational interrelationships (Vangen & Huxham, 2020). Addressing the fourth objective: barriers and enablers, the study offers evidence of organizations that control vital resources which often resist collaborative frameworks that would diminish their autonomy. This study's findings, which note that successful cases actively implemented mechanisms to address those power imbalances, offer practical validation towards theoretical claims on the necessity to manage resource dependencies within network governance.

Policy Recommendations Derived From Theory

The gaps in policy have been identified and addressed with a rationale using the theory of the study's framework to recommend policy adjustments:

Institutional Design for Adaptability: Informed by institutional theory and complex adaptive systems theory, policymakers should focus on creating institutional frameworks requiring lesser rigid arrangements (Sørensen & Torfing, 2024). The study's evidence illustrating flexible institutional arrangements yielding higher coordination effectiveness (82-85) empirically outrunning traditional structures (54) confirms the theory's flexibility predictions. Construct methods that enable policy changes underestimate rapid requirements driven by new information and policy feedback, adjusting to changing circumstances, and incorporating the feedback loops and learning cycles. Institutional theory cites these as vital for adaptive capacity.

Network Investment Strategy: Justifying the resource allocation to building informal networks alongside stakeholdership described in network governance theory is justified in the light of the study's results that informal networks achieved the highest effectiveness scores (85). Foster and allocate resources towards the construction and preservation of networks among diverse stakeholders as relationship building constitutes core governance aided by social capital theory. It holds that trust and reciprocity anchor networks' effectiveness is valid in all successful cases, proving the theory.

Learning Institutionalization: The organizational learning theory provides insights regarding design intentions and validates the study's findings of embedded learning mechanisms being critical to success (Mehryar et al., 2025). As learning processes are institutionalized, they should be regarded as integral to governance frameworks and not superfluous enhancements. The theoretical distinction between single-loop and double-loop learning is empirically illustrated in Odisha, where shifts in fundamental governance(es) were radical rather than incremental.

Contextual Factors and Theoretical Insights

Addressing the study's third objective, the analysis of contextual factors expands the scope of theoretical contribution. These factors include political culture, institutional traditions, and resource availability, which shaped the development and functioning of adaptive governance networks, confirming institutional theory's focus on path dependence and historical institutionalism (Trein et al., 2021).

Crisis Windows and Institutional Change: This finding aligns with punctuated equilibrium theory in the sense that traumatic events combine to form a singularity of opportunity, fundamentally shifting governance frameworks(Munene et al., 2018). The case of Odisha illustrates the potential of external shocks to disrupt equilibria and open windows for transformative change. This insight suggests that crisis moments, and especially those perceived to be most urgent, may provide better conditions for the application of adaptive governance frameworks as they (instantiations of) endure the inertia-prone climate of institutions.

Power-Dependence Dynamics: The research expands the power-dependence theory by showing how decentralization impacts climate governance domains' cross-level power differentials. The imbalance in power between national and local levels creating coordination difficulties validates resource dependence theory in predicting how resources shape inter-organizational power relations. Still, this study illustrates that these power imbalances are resolvable through the design of engagement mechanisms and resource-sharing strategies.

Implementation Challenges and Proposed Solutions

The boundaries stated under the study's fourth objective are aligned with theoretical predictions while pointing out organizational and institutional frameworks as possible solutions.

Bridging the Gap of Institution Fragmentation: The challenge of institutional fragmentation is directly derived from the more general concept of institutional theory, which explains how existing systems tend to be rigid and difficult to alter (Sørensen & Torfing, 2024). The study finds that successful cases devised bridging strategies validate the need for institutional entrepreneurs who transcend boundaries and design collaborative frameworks.

Mobilization of Resources: Limited resources create major hurdles because adaptive governance demands relationship-building and learning processes lacking immediate returns. Resource dependence theory argues that these difficulties can be solved by creating resource-sharing agreements.

Future Research Directions Grounded in Theory

The study identifies several critical gaps that can be researched further to develop more theories:

Longitudinal Network Evolution: The theory of social networks and the theory of organizational ecology can be applied to understand how networks evolve. Further research needs to focus on how adaptive governance networks evolve and what factors support their sustainability through development, maturation, and potential decline phases. This would enhance the existing theoretical understanding of network lifecycles and resilience.

Scaling Mechanisms: The difficulty of expanding successful local networks to broader levels illustrates the theoretical conflict between network governance advantages (flexibility, responsiveness) and larger-scale coordination difficulties. How network governance would face national and international level operations while retaining its principles is an area of future research, perhaps drawing from federalism and multi-level governance theories.

Measurement and Evaluation: Through performance measurement theory and public value theory, the evaluation framework of the study can be further refined. Developing sophisticated measures of governance effectiveness that integrate processes, outcomes, and contextual forces that shape performance is required.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

This analysis of adaptive governance networks pertaining to climate resilience issues provides ample evidence that governance through networks is more effective than traditional hierarchical governance systems. In six diverse cases, we observed adaptive governance networks performing more effectively for coordination, engagement, learning, and recovery tasks.

The study identifies four defining characteristics that outline the success of adaptive governance networks: 'changing circumstances' responsive governance defined through institutional frameworks; governance structures that ensure participation from multiple stakeholders; learning processes within governance systems; and governance mechanisms operating at multiple levels from local to global.

However, the study notes an imbalance of power across governance strata as the primary barrier to adoption alongside limited funding and silos among institutions. These barriers must be overcome if adaptive governance approaches are to be fully realized.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

i. Emphasize agile structures: Go with framework strategies that support responsive institutional arrangements over rigid hierarchies. Put systems in place that allow policy changes on demand due to new intelligence and evolving circumstances.
ii. Build Social Capital: Invest in the creation and deepening of social capital with disparate groups by unlocking funds. Understand that social capital is a governance priority, not ancillary.
iii. Embed Learning: Integrate learning processes as foundational elements of governance systems. Establish regular review and assessment cycles, knowledge-sharing forums, and evaluation frameworks.
iv. Focus on Informal Networks: Put more time and attention into fostering social networks alongside formal organizational structures.
v. Build Adaptive Capacity: Put less emphasis on uniformity and efficiency and shift toward developing the ability to adapt and respond swiftly.

Limitations and Future Research

This specific study is constrained by several limitations, which must be highlighted. The comparative analysis focused on six cases, which, although diverse, are not nearly exhaustive in representing all possible contexts where adaptive governance might be applied. Future studies should focus on other cases, especially in the context of developing countries, alongside a wider variety of climate-related threats.

While comprehensive, the evaluation framework has its shortcomings, such as the reliance on expert evaluations, which may introduce bias. More objective quantifiable frameworks for assessing governance effectiveness and resilience outcomes should be implemented in future studies.

To date, there has been no longitudinal exploration of the evolution of adaptive governance networks or what sustains them over the long term. Given the fluidity of these networks, they cannot be thoroughly captured with snapshot evaluations because such assessments tend to overlook many critical dimensions of functioning and effectiveness.

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