

Diversifying Boundary Organizations: The Making of a Global Platform for Indigenous (and Local) Knowledge in the UNFCCC

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Abstract

The creation of the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) set out to incorporate Indigenous and local knowledge into the science-policy landscape of the climate field. The Platform is a crucial case of institutional change, as it signals an incipient shift from a science-centric toward a pluralistic approach to knowledge in global climate governance. This article traces this process of change in the politics and practices underlying the establishment and design of the Platform as an interface for Indigenous and local knowledge holders. The analysis shows that the sui generis design of the Platform was the product of *bricolage* (recombination) and *translation* (recontextualization) of disparate elements with the purpose of accommodating various political demands in an altogether new kind of knowledge-policy interface: a *diverse boundary organization*. The article makes an empirical contribution to the historical development of knowledge politics in the UNFCCC and a theoretical contribution to the study of boundary organizations by advancing a broader conceptualization that transcends science-centric approaches.

In 2015, the knowledge of Indigenous peoples and local communities was enshrined in the Paris Agreement with reference to climate change adaptation.¹ The mantra of climate policy, according to which the “best available science” should base and guide decision-making, was complemented by a prudent yet ambitious “and as appropriate, traditional knowledge, knowledge of Indigenous peoples and local knowledge systems.”² Most importantly, the accompanying

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1. Paris Agreement, Article 7.5, available at: <https://unfccc.int/documents/37107>, last accessed January 8, 2023.
2. Paris Agreement, Article 7.5, available at: <https://unfccc.int/documents/37107>, last accessed January 8, 2023.

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decision to the Paris Agreement introduces an institutional innovation that materializes this formal recognition by establishing the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP; hereinafter LCIPP or “the Platform”).³ The LCIPP, or the “knowledge platform,” as it came to be known, set out to incorporate these diverse knowledge holders into the science–policy landscape of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The LCIPP thus appears as a crucial case of institutional change that signals deeper transformations in the knowledge base of climate governance, namely, an incipient shift from a science-centric toward a pluralistic approach to knowledge (cf. Beck et al. 2014).

It is striking that despite being a *sui generis* institution eliciting a novel approach to knowledge and policy in the climate field, there is only sparse research on the LCIPP in global environmental politics. The scant existing literature on the Platform consists mainly of prospective—if not prescriptive—analyses of the Platform with little or no consideration of the politics and practices underlying its establishment and its current design as an interface for Indigenous knowledge holders (Belfer et al. 2019; Shawoo and Thornton 2019). Here I set out to account for the making of the LCIPP as a practical accomplishment against the background of a transformation of knowledge politics in the climate field. The contribution of this article is both empirical and theoretical, as it sheds light on the underlying politics and practices that led to the formation of the Platform under the UNFCCC, on one side, and advances a broader understanding of boundary organizations to include diverse knowledge holders, on the other.

How was the LCIPP “made to fit” into the governance architecture of the UNFCCC? If anything, the UNFCCC knows how to bring together scientists, experts, and decision makers. The science–policy landscape of the climate field is made up of an array of bureaucratic practices that produce such interfaces or “boundary organizations” (Sundqvist et al. 2018). But there was no precedent of bringing together Indigenous or local knowledge holders and decision makers in such a setting. Indigenous peoples and local communities were traditionally participating in the UNFCCC as advocacy groups, that is, as stakeholders rather than knowledge holders (Belfer et al. 2019). The establishment of the Platform, therefore, was only possible by engaging with Indigenous peoples (and local communities) in the UNFCCC on the basis of a newly found epistemic status and carving out an institutional space accordingly. Understood in this way, the LCIPP is not only an attempt to further institutionalize stakeholder participation in the UNFCCC; it is an attempt to mediate between diverse knowledge holders and decision makers in global climate politics (cf. Beck et al. 2014; Esguerra and van der Hel 2021).

3. Report of the Conference of the Parties on Its Twenty-First Session, decision 1/CP.21, para. 135, UN Doc. FCCC/CP/2015/10/Add.1, available at: <https://unfccc.int/documents/9097#beg>, last accessed January 8, 2023.

This article argues that the institutional outcome of the Platform was not the result of the preferences of any single actor in the UNFCCC, for example, powerful states or the Indigenous peoples movement. Neither was it the product of a linear process of institutional diffusion stemming from functional necessities or power relations alone. Instead, it was the outcome of an array of practices leading to the recombination (*bricolage*) and recontextualization (*translation*) of disparate components with the purpose of accommodating various political demands in one institutional arrangement: a *diverse boundary organization*.

In the first part of the article, I expound the theoretical approach and methods. In the second part, the empirical analysis begins by tracing how, against the backdrop of Indigenous peoples' organizational templates and the intervention of Bolivia, the Platform became enshrined in a decision of the UNFCCC. The following sections analyze how the design of the LCIPP gave way to an altogether new kind of boundary organization bringing together Indigenous and state representatives. The focus of analysis is on bricolage and translation as sets of practices in the design of LCIPP and its Facilitative Working Group (FWG).

Diverse Boundary Organizations, Bricolage, and Translation

The UNFCCC is an organization with a complex architecture bringing together scientific or technical expertise and decision makers in governance bodies that work as "boundary organizations" (e.g., Hoppe et al. 2013; Miller 2001). Boundary organizations perform a series of tasks that cut across political and scientific worlds. In its original conceptualization, boundary organizations embody a "dual agency," as these respond to scientific and political requirements (Guston 2001). Other accounts see these as part of a hybrid space where organizations deal with a plethora of elements in a dynamic field of tensions (Miller 2001; Parker and Crona 2012). The way in which boundary organizations work hinges on the design and organizational landscape through which these operate (Betsill et al. 2015; Morin et al. 2017). Surprisingly, however, there is little research on how design affects the attributes and performance of boundary organizations (Gustafsson and Lidskog 2018, 7). Looking into the design of boundary organizations is thus crucial to understanding what kind of interface these produce and what affordances these provide to diverse actors across boundaries.

Whereas, in principle, the research on boundary organizations focuses on the interface between science and policy, the concept may be extended to other social worlds if we hark back to its original formulation, which builds on the concept of "boundary objects" (Guston 2001; Star and Griesemer 1989). Boundary objects work as devices that facilitate cooperation in settings with diverse participants. They are flexible enough to span the boundary between

diverse social worlds and accommodate the requirements of different groups, while at the same time maintaining internal coherence. In doing so, boundary objects reconcile diversity and cooperation. According to Guston (2001, 400), boundary organizations produce boundary objects or may even serve as boundary objects. Hence, if we think openly in terms of social worlds, boundary organizations need not be restricted to science-centric configurations. The LCIPP is a case in point insofar as it works as an interface between Indigenous/local knowledge and policy. Hence, to extend the analytical scope of the research on boundary organizations, I propose the concept of *diverse boundary organizations*, which transcends science-centric configurations to encompass knowledge holders from other social worlds.

As an initial approach to understanding how a diverse boundary organization comes into being in global environmental politics, I focus on practices of institutional design using the LCIPP as a crucial case in the climate field. Instead of tracing the preferences of powerful actors or the choices of problem solvers, I focus on the redeployment of practices that make institutional innovation possible within and across fields of governance. The analysis focuses on two sets of practices that were crucial in determining the design of LCIPP: *bricolage* (or recombination) and *translation* (or recontextualization). Bricolage points to institutional design “through the grafting of modular components rather than the *de nova* invention of individual institutional features” (Kalyanpur and Newman 2017, 364; see also Douglas 1986). Put differently, bricolage is about recombining and redeploying what is already there. As Pouliot (2020, 749) notes in reference to historical institutionalism, “agents are pulled toward available ways of doing things: their agency is elicited by the context of action.” Here I focus on bricolage as the work on organizational templates and other elements that move across global or transnational settings.

Because bricolage involves recombining disparate elements, it always raises questions of congruence and compatibility. As Djelic and Quack (2008, 311–312) remark, “transnational institution building can be analyzed as a process of reinterpretation, recombination and bricolage from institutional fragments with different contextual origins.” Here is where translation comes in. Translation refers broadly to the recontextualization of objects (e.g., norms, ideas, organizational components) that move from one setting to another (Berger and Esguerra 2018, 2). Understood in this way, the concept of translation revisits and recasts the scholarship on the flow and diffusion of norms and institutions in global governance. As Adler (2019, 226) points out, “what on the surface appear as ‘diffusion’ of ideas and policies among formal organizations are really translation processes that take place within and between communities of practice. These processes become the source of both practice replication and creative variations, especially because of what is ‘lost’ or gained ‘in translation.’” Translation, therefore, is of critical importance to (re)interpret and recontextualize organizational templates or components moving across fields of governance.

Methods

To trace the unfolding of practices of institutional design, this research draws on three sources of data: direct observations, semistructured interviews, and documents. My main site of fieldwork was the UNFCCC, especially the sessions of the LCIPP and its FWG ([Supplementary Appendix Table A1](#)). Here I was able to engage as both a researcher and a situational participant. In the official language of the UNFCCC, my status of participation in these meetings was as an observer and, more specifically, an LCIPP contributor. Beyond these official sessions, I was able to participate in other events related to the Platform and the Indigenous peoples caucus under the UNFCCC. These included training webinars, multistakeholder dialogues, technical workshops, dedicated events, and informal meetings.

In addition, I use interviews either as an alternative to firsthand observation or as a complementary technique to ground observations in the lived experience of participants. A total of sixteen semistructured interviews were conducted between 2018 and 2020 (fifteen in person and two online). One of the interviews was a group interview, which makes a total of seventeen interviewees ([Supplementary Appendix Table A2](#)). Two interviews were considerably shorter than the rest, with a duration of approximately sixteen and eighteen minutes, respectively. The length of all other interviews was between twenty-eight and fifty-nine minutes, averaging approximately forty minutes. The selection of key informants was driven by “exposure” to the field—the main constraining factor for participation being the availability of interviewees during the negotiations (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2013, 87). The interviewees were all in one way or another direct participants in the making of the LCIPP either as Indigenous representatives or as members of state delegations. To ensure a uniform approach to all interviews, I do not use real names, given that not all of the interviewees agreed that their real names could be used for quotations. Instead, I assign a number to each interview and refer to the organizational affiliation of the interview participant.

Last, documents were key supporting material to trace claims and positions of different actors as well as to reconstruct specific episodes and the outcomes of negotiations. There were overall two phases in the process of document selection. The first phase corresponded to the origins of the Platform and consisted of declarations from Indigenous peoples organizations attending the UNFCCC negotiations and documents tracing the involvement of Bolivia in activities leading to the formal proposal of the Platform. The second phase corresponded to the establishment and operationalization of the Platform and consisted of four sets of documentary sources: UNFCCC reports on the Conference of the Parties (COP) and (draft) decisions as well as other documents about or by the LCIPP; UNFCCC submissions in key episodes in the design of the Platform; reports summarizing informal meetings of the friends of the LCIPP; and position papers, open letters, declarations, or statements from the Indigenous caucus.

The Origins of the Platform

Indigenous Peoples' Organizational Templates

The origins of the Platform trace back to the claims of Indigenous peoples organizations that were seeking a stronger voice in climate negotiations. The increasing presence of Indigenous peoples in UNFCCC negotiations led to the formation of the “Indigenous caucus,” which became a constituency (i.e., a group of observer organizations) at COP7 in 2001 and was further formalized through the creation of the International Indigenous Peoples Forum on Climate Change (IIPFCC) at COP14 in 2008. Whereas the IIPFCC was a milestone in the self-organization of Indigenous peoples within the UNFCCC, there were no direct institutional channels through which these could make recommendations to the UNFCCC. The absence of such spaces stood in stark contrast to other international organizations of global environmental governance, especially the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The CBD features an *ad hoc open-ended intersessional working group* for the implementation of its provisions on traditional knowledge, mainly found in its Article 8(j). This article provides that states shall “respect, preserve and maintain knowledge, innovations and practices of Indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles,” with due account of access and benefit sharing.⁴

Indigenous peoples organizations saw in the working group on Article 8(j) a template of replication. As early as 1998, shortly after the inception of the working group on Article 8(j), the Albuquerque Declaration adopted by North American Indigenous peoples was calling for the establishment of an “Inter-Sessional Open-Ended Working Group for Indigenous Peoples” under the UNFCCC.⁵ The statements and declarations from Indigenous peoples attending the UNFCCC COP and intersessional meetings would reiterate this call for the creation of a working group mirroring the CBD under the UNFCCC. The Marrakesh Declaration of 2001,⁶ released by the Indigenous caucus at COP7, delineates the objectives of such a working group under the UNFCCC, namely, “to study and propose timely, effective and adequate solutions to respond to the urgent situations caused by climate change that Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities face.”⁷ The Indigenous movement was thus drawing on an organizational template from the CBD and attempting to translate it in light of the UNFCCC.

It is unsurprising that Indigenous peoples were drawing on the CBD to make their claims at the UNFCCC. Indigenous representatives attending the

4. CBD decision IV/9, available at: <https://www.cbd.int/decision/cop/?id=7132>, last accessed January 8, 2023.

5. Albuquerque Declaration 2002, 79, available at <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1490786?ln=es#record-files-collapse-header>, last accessed January 12, 2023.

6. Marrakesh Declaration, available at: <https://tebtebba.org/index.php/all-resources/category/80-ipfcc-meetings-2000-2004>, last accessed April 4, 2019.

7. Marrakesh Declaration of 2001, section 5.b.

CBD would usually attend the UNFCCC too. There are no official numbers on this; however, the guesstimate of one Indigenous representative attending the UNFCCC was that “90 per cent of the Indigenous caucus at UNFCCC also participates in the CBD process, so that is the cross-institutional memory that exists.”⁸ However, contrary to the CBD, there was no specific provision in the UNFCCC agreement, nor in the Kyoto Protocol, in relation to Indigenous peoples or traditional knowledge. With no legal instrument to refer to, the demands of Indigenous peoples did not find approval among the parties to the UNFCCC.

The unresponsiveness of states in the climate field contrasted with the breakthrough of Indigenous issues at the United Nations (UN) through the establishment of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) in 2000. The UNPFII, which serves as a high-level advisory body to the Economic and Social Council, addresses a wide range of issues relating to Indigenous peoples. Yet, its most salient feature is arguably its composition. The UNPFII is made up of eighteen members, half of which are states, the other half being Indigenous members with a balanced representation of sociocultural regions. The UNPFII thus establishes an advisory body with a form of parity between states and Indigenous members ([Supplementary Appendix Table A4](#)). The UNPFII became yet another template in later proposals from the Indigenous caucus. The COP21 proposal, for instance, speaks of an “Indigenous peoples’ Experts and ‘knowledge holders’ Advisory body elected by Indigenous organizations and ‘Indigenous territorial governments’ with regional balance.”⁹ These original organizational templates or components appear as a first exercise in bricolage and translation for the design of a diverse boundary organization—albeit without success.

For Indigenous peoples to succeed in bringing the establishment of a working group or an advisory body under the UNFCCC, however, it was imperative for them to establish alliances with states or other nonstate actors with political clout that could bring the propositions of Indigenous peoples to the negotiations. Bolivia would eventually take up this task, albeit in a relatively autonomous manner with respect to the Indigenous caucus. An Indigenous and environmental nongovernmental organization (NGO) representative who was part of the process recounts,

What we were planning as Indigenous organizations was the creation of a forum like the forum of Indigenous peoples in the United Nations [UNPFII]. We wanted to have a forum within the climate change convention to discuss Indigenous issues. They said, “No, we are not going to create that.” We want a working group, a group of experts; [they said] “we don’t work that way.” They wanted nothing. We made some proposals about how we could enter. But our intention in the end has been to have some space to get in and

8. Indigenous Representative 9.

9. IIPFCC, “Our Proposals to Governments,” 3, available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5627862ce4b07be93cfb9461/t/565f8f51e4b06723863ccf5a/1449103185483/Proposals+to+Governments.pdf>, last accessed January 8, 2023.

suddenly be able to speak as equals with the states. We know it is difficult. But everyone is aware of that issue. ... So, we raised the topic of the forum, they said no, then we raised the topic of the working group, they said no. ... All the doors were closed to us. What happened is that when Bolivia came, they said, "Look, let's do this platform and this can be a forum like the one you want where you meet and whoever comes makes recommendations and these recommendations go to SBSTA [Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice] and they discuss it to make policies."¹⁰

This was the beginning of the Platform. A long-lasting Indigenous struggle would become an agenda item spearheaded by the Plurinational State of Bolivia at the behest of the country's first Indigenous president, Evo Morales.

Bolivia and the "Diplomacy of the Peoples"

In the UNFCCC process, Bolivia's engagement became more assertive at COP15 in 2009. The foreign policy of Bolivia at the time was advancing a paradigm shift away from state-centric international relations toward a Diplomacy of the Peoples (Diplomacia de los Pueblos) and the social and environmental principle of "Good Living in Harmony and Balance with Mother Earth" (Plurinational State of Bolivia 2016, "Introduction"). Yet COP15 was marked by the exclusion of civil society from the negotiations and a last-minute agreement between the United States and the BASIC group (Brazil, South Africa, India, and China). This led to a series of mobilizations on the part of Indigenous peoples and other civil society groups, which were joined by the Bolivian president, Evo Morales (Aguirre and Cooper 2010). Following the failure of COP15, Bolivia put the Diplomacy of the Peoples into action by organizing an alternative climate summit with civil society at its center, namely, the World Peoples Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth in Tiquipaya, Cochabamba, in April 2010.

One of the thematic working groups of the Tiquipaya Conference was devoted to Indigenous peoples. Its final conclusion reiterates the importance of the "full and effective participation" of Indigenous peoples in climate change negotiations and policies. However, there is no specific proposal as to how this should be done. The closest it gets to a proposal is in its last point: "we call for an organizational space to be created that will contribute to the global search for effective solutions to climate change, with the special participation of Elders [i.e., Indigenous knowledge holders]."¹¹ The agreement that came out of the Tiquipaya Conference does not repeat this proposal, but it does call for the recognition of the knowledge of Indigenous peoples as part of a broader set

10. Indigenous/NGO Representative 11.

11. Indigenous Peoples' Declaration, Final Conclusions Working Group 7: Indigenous Peoples, World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, April 20–22, 2010, Tiquipaya, Bolivia, available at: <https://pwccc.wordpress.com/category/working-groups/07-indigenous-peoples/>, last accessed January 8, 2023.

of claims, including the establishment of an International Climate Justice Tribunal and the adoption of a Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth.¹² Although these did not come to fruition, the Tiquipaya Conference was illustrative of an alternative approach to climate politics through state-led transnational alliances with civil society groups (cf. López Rivera 2017).

In the run-up to COP21 (2015) in Paris, the Bolivian government organized a follow-up to the Tiquipaya Conference. The final declaration speaks of the creation of an “international permanent platform,” where the struggles of the peoples of the world for Mother Earth would come together.¹³ While the proposal here was not specific to Indigenous peoples, the general idea of a platform harks back to this reference. As a member of the Bolivian delegation noted, although platforms did not form part of the organizational repertoire of the UNFCCC, the use of the term was strategic, as it highlights its political dimension—above all, as an effort to counteract the increasing presence of corporate actors in the climate field.¹⁴ The idea of a platform was in that sense substantially different from the original organizational templates that the Indigenous caucus was unsuccessfully advancing. At COP21, the Bolivian delegation was successful in anchoring Mother Earth in the preamble of the Paris Agreement, as well introducing the Platform into the Paris Decision.

Inventing the Platform

The establishment of the LCIPP is found in paragraph 135 of the Paris Decision in connection with the recognition of the knowledge of Indigenous peoples and local communities:

135. Recognizes the need to strengthen knowledge, technologies, practices and efforts of local communities and indigenous peoples related to addressing and responding to climate change and establishes a platform for the exchange of experiences and sharing of best practices on mitigation and adaptation in a holistic and integrated manner.¹⁵

The paragraph was written by the Bolivian delegation in the midst of hectic negotiations at COP21. As a former member of the Bolivian delegation recounts, “during the Paris negotiations, well, at some point someone from the French [COP] presidency approached us to ask for a paragraph. ... The problem

12. People’s Agreement, World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, April 20–22, 2010, Tiquipaya, Bolivia, available at: <https://pwccc.wordpress.com/support/>, last accessed January 8, 2023.
13. World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Defense of Life, October 10–12, 2015, Tiquipaya, Bolivia, available at: <https://www.mdm.org.ar/informes/35/Declaracion-de-la-Conferencia-Mundial-de-los-Pueblos.pdf>, last accessed January 8, 2023.
14. Government Official 6.
15. Report of the Conference of the Parties on Its Twenty-First Session, decision 1/CP.21, para. 135, UN Doc. FCCC/CP/2015/10/Add.1, available at: <https://unfccc.int/documents/9097#beg>, last accessed January 8, 2023.

was that we wrote the paragraph that had to enter into the agreement a bit quickly.¹⁶ At COP21, the Bolivian delegation did carry out discussions on the Platform with other parties, especially the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America and the Like-Minded Group of Developing Countries. These discussions were inconclusive, and the paragraph itself was not subject to negotiations because, in the words of a Bolivian delegate, “there was no time to share it with anyone.”¹⁷ The elementary practice of drafting a text collectively and carefully choosing every word to strike the right balance between different positions was bypassed because of the frantic pace of the negotiations. The crucial fact, however, is that the paragraph did enter the Paris Decision with no revisions.

Paragraph 135 of the Paris Decision establishes the Platform with the specific purpose of sharing experiences and best practices revolving around the knowledge, technologies, and practices of local communities and Indigenous peoples. However, this remains a somewhat ambiguous creation. In contrast to a working group or a workstream under the UNFCCC, a platform elicits a wide margin of interpretation because of its novelty. By using the term *platform* instead of *working group* or *expert group*, for instance, the Paris Decision did not specify what sort of body was actually being constituted. The ambiguous wording of paragraph 135 was surprisingly successful in producing immediate consensus. Establishing “a platform”—whatever that actually meant—was acceptable for all parties to the UNFCCC.

The invention of the Platform was essentially a call for institutional innovation with the purpose of diversifying boundary organizations in the UNFCCC. In a way, it seems that the magnitude of such an unprecedented task became clear to parties only after the unnegotiated adoption of paragraph 135 in the Paris Decision. The aftermath of COP21 was marked by disagreement over what is—and how to design—a platform. Between COP22 and COP24, the Platform went from being an ambiguous reference in the Paris Decision to a constituted body under the UNFCCC through the establishment of the FWG. The formal negotiations were punctuated by informal meetings of the “friends of LCIPP,” a loose group of states, Indigenous organizations, and other stakeholders (see Figure 1). In the following sections, I zoom in on specific episodes of the negotiation process that were critical in designing the LCIPP and its FWG, with a focus on practices of bricolage and translation.

The Platform After Paris: An Array of Alternatives in Disarray

After COP21 in Paris, the vague formula of paragraph 135 of the Paris Decision was open for negotiation, and there were marked differences as to how to set up the Platform. As a European Union delegate remarked, “back then the mandate

16. Government Official 6.

17. Government Official 6.

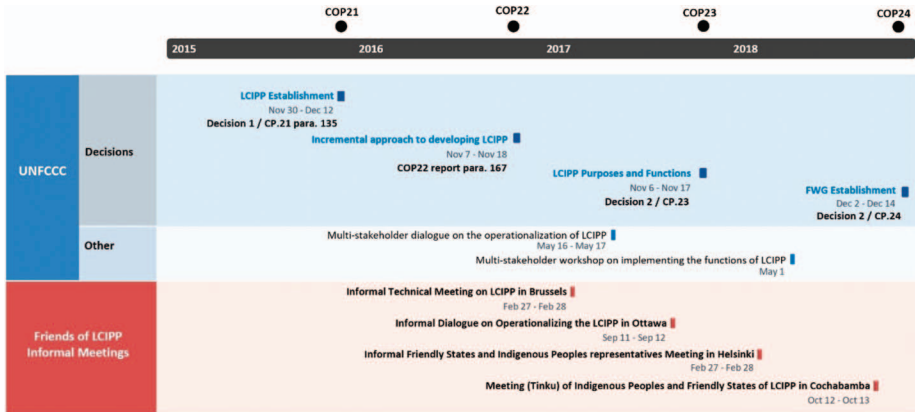


Figure 1

Timeline of the Establishment and Operationalization of the LCIPP Under the UNFCCC 2015–2018

didn't say a lot [and] there were different range of proposals on the table."¹⁸ The array of alternatives was oscillating between two extremes. On one end of the spectrum was the proposition of creating a web-based platform with the purpose of exchanging experiences and best practices. On the other end was the proposal of creating a negotiating body with equal status for Indigenous peoples and states, an arrangement that would in principle include the possibility of giving voting rights to Indigenous representatives. Between these two extremes were a range of possibilities beyond a web portal and short of a negotiating body, including a dialogue platform or an expert group (Riedel and Bodle 2018). The politics of design were thus marked by the struggle over interpretations about what the Platform is and how to set it up.

At COP22 in 2016, the Moroccan COP presidency began informal consultations with parties. The consultations were marked by diverging interpretations of paragraph 135 of the Paris Decision. The outcome of the informal consultations was a minimal agreement on the adoption of an "incremental approach" to the operationalization of the Platform.¹⁹ The first step of this incremental approach was to initiate discussions on what the functions and structure of the LCIPP should be. With this purpose, the Secretariat of the UNFCCC set out to organize an open multistakeholder dialogue and made a call for submissions for parties and other stakeholders. Six state delegations made submissions: Australia, Brazil, Canada, Ecuador, New Zealand, and Malta on behalf of the European Union. The submissions from state delegations made the contrasting positions vis-à-vis the Platform explicit.

18. Government Official 4.

19. Report of the Conference of the Parties on Its Twenty-Second Session. Part One: Proceedings, para. 167a, UN Doc. FCCC/CP/2016/10, available at: <https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2016/cop22/eng/10.pdf>, last accessed January 8, 2023.

The Brazilian delegation put forth a web portal as the cornerstone of the Platform: “Brazil envisages an easy to access, interactive web-based platform that is open for Parties and accredited organizations that represent Indigenous peoples and local communities and observer organizations.”²⁰ Brazil added that the content of the online platform would be defined by an “informal steering group” with balanced representation of states and Indigenous peoples. Australia, for its part, contended that “the most suitable avenue to allow exchange of information and inform decision-making is through dialogue and sharing information through online portals.”²¹ In addition to the web portal, Australia proposed a mandated annual event in the format of a dialogue. Yet, the main thrust of the Brazilian and Australian submissions was the establishment of a web-based platform or a platform that would have an online portal as its cornerstone.

Other state delegations were challenging the proposal of a web-based platform. The submission from the Canadian delegation made this point clear: “In Canada’s view, the Platform: -Should be more than a repository for Indigenous Knowledge (e.g., website or electronic database).”²² This caveat was attuned to the demands of Indigenous peoples. According to Indigenous representatives, the proposal of a web-based platform was premised on a reductionist and problematic understanding of Indigenous knowledge, which presupposes that knowledge can be kept in databases or, for that matter, in an online portal. As an Indigenous representative from the Saami Council put it, “we realized we need more than a website, because ... you cannot write down Indigenous knowledge, you can write down elements of it, but that’s not the knowledge, you know, the knowledge is tied to people and the land, and you cannot write that down or explain it.”²³

The submission from the Indigenous caucus or IIPFCC was calling for a rights-based approach that would guarantee the full and effective participation of Indigenous peoples in UNFCCC processes. Building on and extending the earlier proposal that was put forth at COP21, the IIPFCC was asking for a permanent advisory/facilitative group with the following membership: seven Indigenous representatives and two to four state representatives, as well as the chair of SBSTA. This body would provide advice and make recommendations directly to the COP. Other elements that were proposed included expert

20. Views of Brazil on the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform Referred to in Paragraph 135 of 1/CP.21, section 9, Call for Submissions UNFCCC SBSTA46, available at: <https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/submissionsstaging/Pages/Home.aspx>, last accessed January 8, 2023.
21. Australia’s Submission on the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform, Call for Submissions UNFCCC SBSTA46, available at: <https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/submissionsstaging/Pages/Home.aspx>, last accessed January 8, 2023.
22. Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples’ Platform, Call for Submissions UNFCCC SBSTA46, available at: <https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/submissionsstaging/Pages/Home.aspx>, last accessed January 8, 2023.
23. Indigenous Representative 5.

meetings of Indigenous knowledge holders and the creation of a division for Indigenous peoples within the Secretariat of the UNFCCC.²⁴

The submissions from Canada and Ecuador were the ones that came closest to Indigenous views on how the Platform should be designed. In one of its two submissions, Canada proposed that the Platform should ensure a balanced representation for all participants, in particular states, Indigenous peoples, and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles. The Platform would have two co-chairs, one for states and one for Indigenous peoples organizations, as well as an advisory/facilitative group to support the co-chairs.²⁵ Ecuador, for its part, proposed the most ambitious structure: a permanent body with equal representation for states and organizations of Indigenous peoples and local communities; an expert advisory group; and an open ad hoc working group to develop the structure of the Platform under SBSTA.²⁶

The major outcome of the open multistakeholder dialogue, however, was not to define the structure of the Platform but to detail its functions beyond the general formulation of paragraph 135 of the Paris Decision. Three core functions were identified ([Supplementary Appendix Table A3](#)). Knowledge, the first function, refers especially to the sharing of experiences and best practices to strengthen Indigenous and local knowledge. Capacity for engagement is the second function and points to increasing the participation of Indigenous peoples within the UNFCCC. Last, the third function speaks of the integration of different knowledge systems to inform climate action and policies at the national and international levels. By the end of the dialogue, it was clear that a web-based platform would not suffice to fulfill the newly defined functions of the Platform. The online portal would remain as one of the components—albeit not the cornerstone—of the Platform.

Design by Bricolage: The Facilitative Working Group

The invention of the FWG was a compromise among alternatives that were first discussed in informal negotiations among the “friends of LCIPP.” At the second informal meeting in Ottawa in September 2017, the main ideas on the governance structure of the Platform as a boundary organization were put on the

24. Submission of the International Indigenous Peoples’ Forum on Climate Change (IIPFCC) on the Purpose, Content and Structure for the Indigenous Peoples’ Traditional Knowledge Platform, 1/CP.21, Paragraph 135 of the Paris Decision, Call for Submissions UNFCCC SBSTA46, available at: https://unfccc.int/files/parties_observers/submissions_from_observers/application/pdf/865.pdf, last accessed January 8, 2023.
25. Canada’s Second Submission on the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform, Call for Submissions UNFCCC SBSTA46, available at: <https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/submissionsstaging/Pages/Home.aspx>, last accessed January 8, 2023.
26. Ecuador’s Submission on Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform, Referred to in Paragraph 135 of decision 1/CP.21, Call for Submissions UNFCCC SBSTA46, available at: <https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/submissionsstaging/Pages/Home.aspx>, last accessed January 8, 2023.

table in the run-up to COP23. What came out of this informal meeting was the initiative of appointing a “small group” to lead the work of the Platform. Three alternatives were considered: an expert/advisory group or panel, an open ad hoc working group, and a facilitative group led by two co-chairs.²⁷ A key difference among these options was that a working group would arguably involve the creation of a negotiating body, whereas an advisory or facilitative group would be a governing body, but not a negotiating body. Notably, a negotiating body where Indigenous and local representatives would stand on equal footing with state representatives was unlikely, if not impracticable, given that the observer status of the former did not allow for the establishment of such a body and there were no prospects of a fundamental change in the status of nonstate actors (Riedel and Bodle 2018, 40–42).

The compromise found in the COP23 decision was an innovation stemming from design by bricolage: the Facilitative Working Group.²⁸ Up until then, there was no such thing under the UNFCCC. The COP23 decision was introducing new language. The FWG was a merger of two alternatives: a facilitative group and a working group. The caveat, however, was that the FWG would not be a negotiating body. The combination of different proposals, in that sense, was more rhetorical than factual. The decision was not to create a negotiating body such as a working group, but the term *working group* was kept to accommodate diverging positions. The ambiguity of the FWG compound was set to produce consensus. As Stone (2012, 180), quoting Murray Edelman, explains, “ambiguity allows policymakers to placate both sides in a conflict by ‘giving the rhetoric to one side and the decision to the other.’” Ironically, this is how the original organizational template of Indigenous peoples, namely, a working group, traveled from the CBD to the UNFCCC.

The design of the FWG was a bricolage or recombination of disparate elements that were made to fit the legal and institutional framework of the UNFCCC. The UNPFII was a model for “balanced representation” between state and Indigenous representatives, while the CBD was a model for knowledge brokering foregrounding the status of Indigenous peoples and local communities as knowledge holders. These available ways of designing institutions in the wider UN constellation were put together to accommodate diverging positions and fit into the underlying framework of the UNFCCC. The FWG thus became a so-called constituted body under the UNFCCC to further operationalize the

27. Informal Dialogue on Operationalizing the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform Under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, “Summary of Discussions,” 11–12, September 2017, Ottawa, Canada, available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5627862ce4b07be93cfb9461/t/5ae702220e2e72dfd92b8fa9/1525088803853/Summary+of+Discussions++Informal+Dialogue+on+the+Local+Communities+and+Indigenous+Peoples+Platform+++Ottawa++Sept.11-12.pdf>, last accessed January 8, 2023.
28. Report of the Conference of the Parties on Its Twenty-Third Session, decision 2/CP.23, para. 10, UN Doc. FCCC/CP/2017/11/Add.1, available at: <https://unfccc.int/documents/65126>, last accessed January 8, 2023.

Platform under the guidance of SBSTA, which, in turn, reviews the outcome of its workplan and makes further recommendations to the COP.²⁹

The FWG, as the cornerstone of the LCIPP, thus embodies a dual role of political representation and knowledge brokering.³⁰ Political representation, on one hand, undergirds the membership of the FWG, as it establishes equal status for Indigenous and state representatives. Knowledge brokering, on the other hand, is observable in the design of the FWG as an advisory or expert body providing technical input and as an interface for Indigenous (and local) knowledge holders. Therefore, the Indigenous representatives of the FWG are, at once, knowledge brokers and political representatives.

How to better incorporate Indigenous knowledge holders or “Elders” in the design of the Platform and the FWG remains a question, however. The interface with knowledge holders is found not in the FWG per se but in the activities of the FWG, which include annual meetings and (bi)regional gatherings.³¹ Yet ensuring a meaningful participation of knowledge holders remains a challenge. This was eloquently put at the fourth meeting of the FWG by Hindou Ibrahim, a Mbororo Indigenous representative and member of the FWG:

I wanted more clarification, maybe I misunderstood, when you say the participation of our knowledge holders, are they participating? Like are they at the next FWG meeting face-to-face or at the regional meetings or at the national meetings? I do not understand because I do not see that my grandpa or, I don't know, my grandma or I do not see my uncle or auntie or whatever that they leave their cattle and then just come to Germany or fly somewhere just to say “oh, look out guys, I do have the knowledge on doing ... how the cattle work and how I can grass or how I can protect this one.” I do not see them doing this kind of things, so when we talk about knowledge holders, is it going to be a representative of our governance or of our organization or how does it work?³²

To close her intervention, Ibrahim made a call to look beyond the rules and procedures of the UNFCCC and think about alternative ways of doing things. Her remarks highlight the fact that Indigenous knowledge holders cannot act as scientific experts in climate negotiations. The conventional tasks of

29. Report of the Conference of the Parties on Its Twenty-Fourth Session, decision 2/CP.24, UN Doc. FCCC/CP/2018/10/Add.1, available at: <https://unfccc.int/documents/193360>, last accessed January 8, 2023.

30. Beyond the FWG, other components and activities of the Platform draw on participatory practices, such as multistakeholder dialogues and a web-based portal that sets out to work as a “knowledge hub.”

31. “Concept Note: LCIPP Workplan Activity 1,” UNFCCC, available at: https://lcipp.unfccc.int/sites/default/files/2021-06/Concept%20Note_Activity%201.ver_14.06_0.pdf, last accessed January 8, 2023; “Concept Note: LCIPP Workplan Activity 2,” UNFCCC, available at: https://lcipp.unfccc.int/sites/default/files/2021-06/LCIPP%20CN_Activity%202%20reg%20gatherings_ver%2014%20June%202021.pdf, last accessed January 8, 2023.

32. “Day 1—Fourth Meeting of the Facilitative Working Group (FWG) of the LCIPP,” 1:04:04–1:04:54, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eng6gpguRGU&list=PlyZbckPRNFataYGUQRr-FVcdTA9nOoAB2>, last accessed January 8, 2023.

constituted bodies under the UNFCCC, which consist in providing expertise and technical input, do not seem to suffice for a diverse boundary organization such as the LCIPP.

Lost in Translation: The Local Communities Issue

The use of the formula “local communities and indigenous peoples” in the Paris Decision was an extraneous reference to the CBD with inversions and omissions. The Paris Decision speaks of local communities tout court, whereas Article 8(j) of the CBD speaks of “local communities embodying traditional lifestyles.”³³ Referring to this, one EU delegate noted that the fact that the text was “omitting the important ‘traditional lifestyles’” brought some difficulties for the identification of local communities as distinct from Indigenous peoples.³⁴ In the design of the FWG, the representation of local communities became a contentious issue because it was unclear who represent these in the context of the UNFCCC. There is no constituency of local communities under the UNFCCC. Besides, the order in which these appear in the Paris Decision is inverted: local communities appear first and Indigenous peoples second. As an Indigenous and NGO representative put it, that order “is very strange for anyone who works on issues of Indigenous peoples. But the Bolivians put it [in that order]. So, there is a message in there.”³⁵

Indigenous peoples were not willing to be appended to local communities. To the contrary, for some Indigenous representatives, this was a way of neglecting their status as peoples with the right to self-determination. An Indigenous representative from the Inuit Circumpolar Council put this emphatically: “I think it is really important—I will go back to what I said earlier—that if I had been involved in the negotiation of it [LCIPP] I would have argued for no reference to local communities at all, that Indigenous peoples, their status, their rights, are unique and distinct and separate from local communities.”³⁶ The Platform was after all a state-led proposal.

The negotiations that began at the forty-eighth meeting of SBSTA in April–May 2018 were about translating “balanced representation” and “local communities” into the language of the UNFCCC—that is, recontextualizing these elements in a new setting. The first draft conclusions of the negotiations were proposing a total of fourteen representatives: seven representatives from Indigenous peoples organizations and seven party representatives. Party representatives would comprise the five UN regional groups (Africa, Asia-Pacific, Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, Western Europe and Other

33. CBD, decision IV/9, emphasis added, available at: <https://www.cbd.int/decision/cop/?id=7132>, last accessed January 8, 2023.

34. Government Official 4.

35. Indigenous/NGO Representative 11.

36. Indigenous Representative 7.

States), plus one from a least developed country and one from a small island developing state. As for Indigenous peoples, representatives would come from the seven sociocultural regions identified by the UNPFII ([Supplementary Appendix Table A4](#)). The leadership roles of the FWG would be given to two co-chairs, one from parties and one from Indigenous peoples organizations. The remaining issue was how to integrate local communities into this arrangement.

The draft conclusion put forth two options to solve the problem of the representation of local communities. The first option was to lump together Indigenous peoples and local communities by specifying that the seven non-party representatives would come from “[local communities [embodying traditional lifestyles] and] indigenous peoples organizations[, one from each of the seven UN Indigenous sociocultural regions] and indigenous peoples organizations.”³⁷ The second option, which was thought of as an interim solution to avoid a lack of representation of local communities, was to split the membership so that the seven nonparty representatives would be four Indigenous representatives and three local communities representatives nominated by parties.³⁸

Acknowledging that local communities do not have a representation mechanism under the UNFCCC, their nomination would be subordinated to parties or Indigenous peoples organizations. The self-selection of local community representatives was, in the first instance, unforeseeable given the absence of an official local communities constituency under the UNFCCC. The negotiating practice that came to the fore at this moment was “holding a bracket,” that is, differing the agreement on the wording of a formal text, with brackets containing alternatives to the representation of local communities. The COP24 decision establishing the FWG put forth a provisional solution by adopting the initial arrangement of fourteen representatives for states and Indigenous peoples (seven each), while postponing the issue of local communities to COP27.³⁹ At COP26 in 2021, however, it was decided to further postpone the consideration of the local communities’ issue in the next review of the FWG at COP29 in 2024.⁴⁰

The translation issues derived from the bricolage of disparate elements with different contextual origins. Under the UNFCCC, balanced representation

37. Draft decision -/CP.24, Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform, Co-Facilitators’ Draft Text, para. 3d, version of May 9, 2018, as of 22:00, available at: https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/SBSTA48.DT_i7.LCIP_.pdf, last accessed January 8, 2023.

38. Draft decision -/CP.24, Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform, Co-Facilitators’ Draft Text, para. 3d alt, version of May 9, 2018, as of 22:00, available at: https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/SBSTA48.DT_i7.LCIP_.pdf, last accessed January 8, 2023.

39. Report of the Conference of the Parties on Its Twenty-Fourth Session, decision 2/CP.24, para. 4, UN Doc. FCCC/CP/2018/10/Add.1, available at: <https://unfccc.int/documents/193360>, last accessed January 8, 2023.

40. Report of the Conference of the Parties on Its Twenty-Sixth Session, decision 16/CP.26, para. 12, UN Doc. FCCC/CP/2021/12/Add.2, available at: <https://unfccc.int/documents/460955>, last accessed January 8, 2023.

was impracticable in the form of a working group or negotiating body, and local communities were not a formal group of nonstate actors or constituency. In other words, the language of the UNPFII and the CBD was partly untranslatable in the context of the UNFCCC. The lingering issue of translation hinders the capacity of the FWG and the Platform in general to work as a boundary organization, especially because it turns these accomplishments into interim solutions, thereby impeding the consolidation of a lasting institutional configuration.

Conclusions

The establishment of the LCIPP under the UNFCCC marks a process of institutional change toward the diversification of knowledge–policy relations in global climate governance. Here I explain how the making of the Platform led to the establishment of an altogether new kind of interface: a *diverse boundary organization* that transcends the science-centric approach to knowledge politics in the climate field. I analyze the LCIPP and its FWG as a practical achievement whereby innovation results from the redeployment of organizational templates and available practices of institution-building in the UNFCCC and the wider UN constellation. In particular, the analysis shows that the FWG was the product of design by bricolage and translation as a means to accommodate diverging positions in one institutional arrangement. Bricolage set out to combine disparate elements deriving mainly from the CBD and the UNPFII, whereas translation came to the fore as an endeavor to make sense of the Platform and recontextualize the components from other settings in the UNFCCC.

The current design of the LCIPP revolves around the FWG as a steering body that facilitates the implementation of the functions of the Platform. The design of the FWG combines a dual role of knowledge brokering and political representation. The Indigenous members of the FWG embody this dual role as knowledge brokers and political representatives. This hybrid status is indicative of a *sui generis* arrangement that escapes the two-worlds perspective on boundary organizations as interfaces for science and policy. The initial work of the Platform as a diverse boundary organization, therefore, has been about figuring out innovative ways of producing a new kind of interface, with a focus on incorporating Indigenous (and local) knowledge holders in the UNFCCC process and beyond.

Some loose ends and incongruences remain, however, in the design of the LCIPP and its FWG especially regarding its membership and functions. The membership of the FWG involves the difficult question of how to include local communities—which are not a constituency under the UNFCCC—in the current arrangement of equal status for Indigenous and state representatives. The issue will remain highly relevant until its reconsideration at COP29 in 2024. As for the functions of the Platform, there is an underlying tension between its role as an expert or advisory body and its role as an interface for diverse knowledge

holders. The global—as well as (bi)regional—gatherings of knowledge holders held in conjunction with COP26 and COP27 constitute a first instance of experimentation. These activities highlight the issue of how the Platform could make a difference on the ground and avoid the remoteness of other global platforms. In any case, the design and initial work of the LCIPP indicates that, although the shift toward a more pluralistic approach to knowledge in the climate field remains inchoate, the diversification of boundary organizations is underway and will remain a key area of institutional innovation in global climate governance.

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