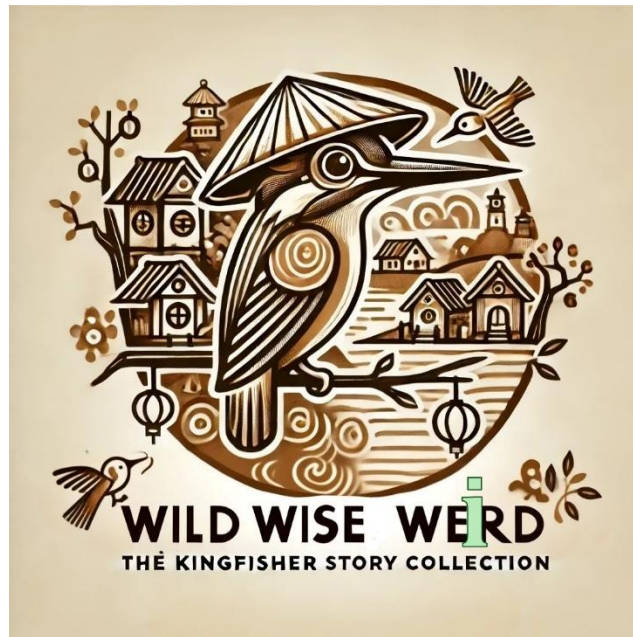


Governing Climate in the Paris Era: Why Climate Action Still Misses the Point

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“– Being gone is up to Heaven; how could I know?”

In “Joint Venture”; *Wild Wise Weird* [1]



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Since the adoption of the 2015 Paris Agreement, global climate governance has shifted from binding international targets to a framework based on voluntary commitments by states, cities, businesses, and even individuals. At first glance, this pluralistic approach may seem like progress—more actors should, theoretically, lead to more action. However, Florian Steig and Angela Oels [2] argue that this shift has, in fact, entrenched a system of what they term “organized irresponsibility,” where the semblance of action masks the persistence of deeper structural problems.

Drawing on Michel Foucault’s concept of governmentality, Steig and Oels [2] reveal that climate governance under the Paris regime extends beyond formal laws and treaties. It operates subtly through performance indicators, voluntary pledges, and market incentives. Yet, rather than addressing the root causes of the climate crisis—fossil-fueled capitalism, global inequality, and unsustainable patterns of production and consumption—the Paris Framework prioritizes carbon accounting, self-determined national targets (Nationally Determined Contributions or NDCs), and technocratic solutions such as carbon markets and negative emissions technologies [3,4]. This narrow focus obscures the uncomfortable reality that global greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise.

The study also highlights that climate adaptation is increasingly treated as a technical matter, sidelining its social and political dimensions. Vulnerable communities are urged to “build resilience” without adequate attention to why they are vulnerable in the first place. Similarly, climate finance—originally intended to assist developing countries—has been progressively absorbed into the logic of global financial markets, limiting its ability to drive meaningful change. Even the contentious issue of “Loss and Damage,” through which developing countries have long sought accountability and reparations for climate-related harms, has been reframed as a voluntary and charity-like mechanism, effectively sidelining debates about liability and historical responsibility [5].

Steig and Oels [2] contend that this prevailing “cli-mentality”—a climate-specific mode of thinking and governing—not only sustains but actively reproduces the global status quo. By reducing climate change to a problem of emissions management and technical solutions, the dominant approach systematically sidelines deeper issues such as global inequality, colonial legacies, and structural injustices. Even more troubling, it normalizes the expectation of an increasingly disaster-prone future, presenting climate-related catastrophes as inevitable rather than as the outcome of deliberate political and economic choices.

Ultimately, the authors call for a profound reorientation of global climate governance. While the Paris-inspired model may efficiently coordinate a wide array of actors, it leaves intact the unsustainable patterns of production, consumption, and power relations at the heart of the climate crisis. Genuine and effective climate action, Steig and Oels [2] argue, must go beyond numerical targets and market mechanisms. It requires confronting the root causes of the crisis and prioritizing the empowerment of the communities most affected [6].

References

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