



Governmentality and the climate-development nexus: The case of the EU Global Climate Change Alliance

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ABSTRACT

This article uses a governmentality perspective to uncover the power effects of the external climate change adaptation assistance provided by the European Union (EU) through its flagship initiative in this regard: the Global Climate Change Alliance. By drawing upon a body of literature that conceptualizes the established international architecture in this regard as rooted in power relations, this article opens up our current perspective of the EU as an international climate actor. An analysis of policy documents and targeted semi-structured interviews reveals that the EU discursively emphasizes the responsibility of partner countries to manage risk and become 'resilient' to climate impacts, while downplaying the transformative potential of adaptation for development. We see this dynamic further reflected in GCCA policy techniques, which promote the production of quantified and depoliticized knowledge on adaptation. This in its turn further guides the allocation of GCCA support and is instrumentalized in order to establish a stable identity for the organization and reproduce the EU as a climate leader in this regard.

1. Introduction

Climate change adaptation has become a prominent issue in development cooperation, leading to donors addressing this in development efforts (Runhaar et al., 2018). So too the European Union (EU), which has committed itself to *mainstreaming* climate change in development cooperation (Adelle et al., 2018). To pursue this objective, the EU founded a dedicated institution in 2007: the Global Climate Change Alliance (GCCA) aims to facilitate dialogue as well as to provide technical and financial support for adaptation, in particular vis-a-vis Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) (GCCA, 2015a). Since it describes itself as "one of the most significant climate change initiatives in the world" and claims to offer innovative approaches for adaptation in the South (European Commission, 2015: 3), it is a highly relevant representation of what it means to govern the climate-development nexus, both within the EU and beyond.

This article uses a governmentality approach to uncover the power effects hidden in the discursive constructions and policy arrangements of the GCCA. Combining a document analysis of EU policy documents with targeted semi-structured interviews, it shows that the GCCA transmits power effects through its operations in terms of creating a particular 'truth' on adaptation and how to pursue it, as well as how to generate knowledge on the impact of adaptation projects. Empirically, this article adds to the limited research into the climate-development

within an EU-context (cf. Gupta & van der Grijp, 2010; Adelle et al., 2018), by constituting one of the first inquiries into the workings of the GCCA.

Theoretically, the article contributes to the literature which scrutinizes the power effects of EU foreign policy through a Foucauldian lens (İşleyen, 2015; Kurki, 2010; Merlingen, 2007). Scholarly work on EU external climate governance has not followed suit in this regard: although there is a lot of emphasis on the normative credentials of the EU as an international climate 'leader' (Kilian and Elgström, 2010; Bäckstrand and Elgström, 2013), no research has yet problematized the power effects encapsulated in the policy choices made in this regard. This article also fits the broader literature on the power effects transmitted through dominant logics and practices of development cooperation (Ferguson, 1994; Li, 2007; Death, 2013), climate governance (Bäckstrand and Lövbrand, 2007; Methmann, 2010) and the nexus between both policy domains (Lauer and Eguavoen, 2016).

The first section constitutes a brief introduction to governmentality and the Foucauldian interpretation of power and government. Section 2 and 3 provide a short overview of the literature that links governmentality to international climate governance, development cooperation, and the nexus between these policy domains. Section 4 introduces the GCCA and places it within the role conception of EU climate 'leadership'. This is followed by an introduction of the analytical framework and the actual governmentality analysis of the GCCA. Finally,

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some overarching conclusions are provided, as well as avenues for further research.

2. Unpacking governmentality

The concept of governmentality was introduced by Michel Foucault as a way of tracing an evolving conception of ‘the art of government’. Foucault’s work provides three main insights in this regard: first, he conceptualizes power as not only repressive, but also *productive*. Power is not solely based on domination or coercion, but also operates through practices of freedom and consent (Dean, 2010; Rutherford, 2007). Productive power is a diffuse and capillary entity, with the ability of *producing* social subjects through discursive practices and governmental techniques (Foucault, 2008; Merlingen, 2011).

Second, Foucault describes government as an ever-expanding activity, constantly incorporating new issues as domains for intervention. The common thread throughout Foucault’s work is his attempt at describing how the conception of government changed over the course of centuries from governing a territory to governing “the complex of men and things” (Foucault, 2007: 135). Central to this expanding conception of government is the idea of ‘the population’, which serves as a framework in which people are expected to behave properly, in order not be excluded from it.

Third, a central role is assigned to knowledge production in this process of governmental expansion, making knowledge and power intrinsically linked. Before something can become the subject of governing, it must first be known and represented in a particular fashion. Knowledge thus molds issues into something fit for governmental intervention, and the act of knowledge production can therefore never be neutral (Townley, 1993: 521).

In his later work, Foucault defined the contemporary ‘art of government’ as essentially neoliberal (Foucault, 2008). Neoliberal governmentality bases subjectivities on economic principles of market functioning and competition, which then become the foundations of individual action (Dilts, 2011). This is a powerful tool for depoliticization and individualization: personal success or failure are to be attributed to the individual, while collective or governmental responsibility for the factors that might lead to success or failure become diluted (Dilts, 2011; Foucault, 2008).

However, instead of approaching governmentality as synonymous for neoliberalism, it should be perceived as a ‘triangle’ of three forms of power: sovereignty, discipline and governmental management (Foucault cited in Rosenow, 2009: 500). Sovereign power operates in the ‘classical’ sense, through law and violence over a given territory and its subjects (Walters and Haahr, 2005: 9). Disciplinary power works by employing “surveillance and normalizing techniques to produce useful, calculable subjects” (Walters and Haahr, 2005: 10). Finally, governmental management refers to what is most frequently defined as ‘the conduct of conduct’, or the exercise of power through actions of freedom. The concept of governmentality thus incorporates both power in the ‘classic’ sense and power through freedom and self-government. In the next section, I will further specify the relevance of these insights for the way in which climate change is rendered governable on an international level.

3. Governmentality within the climate-development nexus

Within international climate governance, Foucault’s ideas have inspired a body of literature on ‘green governmentality’ (Goldman, 2001; Rutherford, 2007). This work focuses on the expansion of government to include ecosystems and nature as a whole, based on new forms of ‘eco-knowledges’ that render these sites governable and marginalize alternative understandings of the natural world (Bäckstrand and Lövbrand, 2006). The central aim of green governmentality studies is to uncover how ‘truth’ on climate change and nature is produced by various societal actors, and how this legitimizes specific forms of

regulation and governance (Rutherford, 2007).

According to Methmann (2010: 12–13), the four pillars of green governmentality are globalism, scientism and the ethics of growth and efficiency. Globalism and scientism refer to a system of planetary management, based on a technocratic approach in which nature becomes *infrastructuralized* and its value determined in terms of the resource outputs it can deliver. The ethics of growth and efficiency in their turn are linked to a political rationality of *ecological modernization*, implying the introduction of advanced liberal government within international climate politics (Oels, 2005: 197). Wanner (2015: 23) labels ecological modernization the *neoliberalization* of nature, in which governing climate change is built around the creation of fictitious commodities to reduce nature to an economic asset (Wanner, 2015). Through these rationalities, nature is reduced to an economic input to be managed through administrative and scientific management systems (Bäckstrand and Lövbrand, 2006). In sum, green governmentality points at the emergence of an ecological power/knowledge system, based on an objectified scientific discourse of Earth’s carrying capacity and its ecological limits, implying that Earth’s resources and nature are inherently manageable (Rutherford, 2007: 298). In the end, ‘the environment’ becomes reduced to what Luke (1996: 4) dubs a “terrestrial infrastructure for global capital”.

In addition, existing literature also looks into the influence of these rationalities in the Global South. Important in this regard is the growing practice of integrating or *mainstreaming* climate change in aid activities (Gupta & van der Grijp, 2010; Runhaar et al., 2018). Especially for adaptation, this integration process poses a distinct challenge, as the concept touches upon a wide variety of sectoral activities within development cooperation (Lauer and Eguavoen, 2016). From a governmentality perspective, the idea of ‘mainstreaming’ is particularly interesting. Rather than being a technocratic exercise, integrating adaptation in development can also be perceived as fundamentally political. If we consider the nexus between both policy domains as contingent, we have to perceive governance on this ‘frontier’ of policy making as inherent acts of creation and interpretation (Oppermann, 2011: 73). Frames provided and policy choices made thus determine how adaptation is perceived, what knowledge is considered eligible, which policy options are rendered possible and which are excluded.

Existing literature has already dived extensively in the power/knowledge systems that underpin practices of development cooperation, looking into the way in which development institutions construct partner countries as objects of knowledge, and legitimize their interventions accordingly. According to Death (2013: 778), “the existence of semi-formalized internationally acceptable forms of knowledge for development are identifiable, through which new truths about development are produced” (Death (2013: 778). Authors like Ferguson (1994) and Li (2007) have been influential in their descriptions of how the causes of underdevelopment and poverty are standardly depicted as fundamentally technical, thereby leaving any structural/political factors out of the equation. These particular truths on development create a field of intervention that only supports technocratic governance techniques, based on scientific data collection, monitoring and evaluation, feeding into a system of bureaucratic procedures and promoting forms of entrepreneurial conduct (Phillips and Ilcan, 2004). Inevitably, development narratives of ‘ownership’, ‘agency’ and ‘capacity’ also become structured along these particular conceptions of truth, setting the perimeters within targeted actors are ought to behave (cf. Li, 2007). Hence, this creates a strong socialization dynamic, in which the issue of ‘underdevelopment’ is completely projected upon targeted actors within developing countries, and in which actors are ought to become ‘responsible’ managers of their own predefined development imperative (Li, 2007).

Climate adaptation has been heralded as a potential vector for change in this regard (e.g. Lauer and Eguavoen, 2016). Through adaptation, development cooperation could re-engage with the political economy of poverty, by focusing on the factors that render people

vulnerable to climate change in the first place. Adaptation then becomes a story of access to resources and decision-making structures, as well as persistent socio-economic inequalities (Lauer and Eguavoen, 2016). Hence, integrating adaptation in development constitutes “an opportunity for social reform, for the questioning of values that drive inequalities in development and our unsustainable relationship with the environment” (Lauer and Eguavoen, 2016: 88).

In contrast, Methmann (2010) argued that the idea of ‘mainstreaming’ climate change in third policy domains does not necessarily invoke a shift away from the business-as-usual approach, instead serving as a way of legitimizing the status quo. Death (2015) comes to similar insights in relation to the nexus, pointing out the dominance of ecological modernization discourse in national development strategies of African states, which manifests itself in concepts like green *growth* and green *resilience*. The latter concept was further conceptualized by Joseph (2013; 2014) as emblematic for neoliberal governmentality. He argued that resilience represents an ever-increasing complexity of the world and our individual responsibility in adapting to complexities and contingencies. Through this mechanism, any responsibility of the international community for such complex problems becomes diluted, while local actors in the Global South are held accountable for internal governance issues that may undermine their adaptive capacity.

In sum, we arrive at a particularly interesting conflict at the intersection of these two policy domains: one the one hand, adaptation is said to be able to alter the dominant rationalities in contemporary development practices, which export (neo)liberal and technocratic governance techniques. On the other hand, some authors hint at the idea that this ‘transformative’ potential could be neutralized by rendering it governable through rationalities linked to ecological modernization and green governmentality (cf. supra). Hence, the GCCA is an interesting case to analyze the extent to which existing development rationalities are reproduced through adaptation, and the extent to which they are altered as a result of this integration process. In the following section, I will introduce the agency as a site for analysis, by placing it in the broader context of EU climate leadership and the EU’s normative identity.

4. The GCCA and EU climate leadership

The GCCA was established in 2007 to provide climate-related assistance towards the Global South. It is structured around two pillars: policy dialogue and technical/financial support to the implementation of national adaptation policies. In 2014, the GCCA became the GCCA + as part of the newly founded Global Public Goods and Challenges Programme (GPGC). It operates as complementary to the international climate regime, as well as to the 2030 agenda on Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (GCCA, 2015a).

The agency’s assistance is a concrete manifestation of the EU’s role as an international climate *leader*. Over the years, an entire branch of literature has developed around this role conception, identifying three sources of leadership: (i) the introduction and externalization of ambitious and innovative climate policies (ii) the use of power derived from material sources and (iii) climate diplomacy (Kilian and Elgström, 2010). In recent years, the EU has evolved from a leader to a *leadicator*: apart from implementing and externalizing ambitious internal climate policies, it has increasingly relied on climate diplomacy and improving its relations with the Global South (Bäckstrand and Elgström, 2013). The need for climate-related support for the Global South was hence included in the baseline documents that guide EU aid activities in third countries: the European Commission (2006, 2017a) and the Agenda for Change (European Commission, 2011). Consequently, the GCCA can be perceived as the embodiment of this leadicator role, combining a sense of innovative policy making with its task of providing technical and financial adaptation assistance for developing countries.

The idea of climate leadership is seen as an extension of the EU’s

international ‘normative’ power. This implies that the EU’s international role is not dictated by its own interests: based on its characteristics as a post-sovereign entity built upon a normative basis, the EU stands for a form of value-based conduct in international relations (Manners, 2002). Merlingen (2007) convincingly argued that a governmentality perspective can uncover the double-sided nature of this normative power. In his view, even seemingly ‘normative’ EU policy techniques which at first glance do not evoke an image of power play – like EU assistance for adaptation in the Global South – can produce real power effects by exporting certain subjectivities of ‘good ethical conduct’. Using a governmentality lens to look at the GCCA as a specific instance of EU climate leadership will thus give a first impression of the implicit power effects transmitted through this role conception. Before turning to the analysis, the following section will outline the analytical framework and consulted data.

5. Analytical framework, methods and data

Having outlined the central ideas postulated through governmentality theory, the question remains how these ideas can be translated into a concrete research strategy. The merits of governmentality lie in the description, connection and problematization of political rationalities, systems of knowledge and micro-practices. Therefore, it requires a combination of (i) textual analysis to uncover underlying rationalities of government and (ii) an insight into the micro-political practices which are deployed to deal with a certain issue.

In order to live up to these requirements, an *analytics of government* framework will be used in this article (Dean, 2010; Oels, 2005). It distinguishes between four analytical dimension of governmentality: fields of visibility, technical aspects, forms of knowledge and formation of identities. This allows for a comprehensive oversight of the power effects that are transmitted through the political rationalities that guide the GCCA, as well as the governance techniques implemented by it (Table 1).

In terms of data, over 40 policy documents were consulted, covering both discursive representations of the climate-development nexus, as well as technical documents on GCCA functioning. These documents were systematically coded and analyzed using NVivo software. This not only allowed for structurally coding the gathered data, but also to clearly see the prevalence of various discursive constructions in EU documents. In addition, four targeted semi-structured interviews were conducted with policy officials closely involved in the inner workings of the GCCA, in order to get a better image of some of the technical aspects of its functioning. These interviews were fully transcribed and used to better contextualize the findings from the document analysis.

6. Governmentality within the GCCA

6.1. Fields of visibility

First of all, the GCCA discourse emphasizes the impact and

Table 1
Analytics of government (based on Dean, 2010; Oels, 2005).

Analytical category	Guiding questions
Fields of visibility	What is illuminated, what obscured? What problems are to be solved?
Technical aspects	By what instruments, procedures and technologies is rule accomplished?
Forms of knowledge	Which forms of thought arise from and inform the activity of governing?
Formation of identities	What forms of self are presupposed by practices of government? Which transformations are sought?

consequences of climate change. Adaptation through development activities is pictured against a background of ‘catastrophic’ climate change. A grim prospect of climate change is painted, with numerous references to climate-related disasters and their security implications, such as the destabilization of regions, increases in conflict prevalence and irregular migration (European Commission, 2017b) and even upsurges of terrorism and radicalization (European Union, 2017). Finally, the idea of climate change as a threat to economic growth is also established in GCCA discourse, with numerous references to climate change as a “challenge to economic growth” (e.g. European Commission, 2018), and adaptation as an opportunity for strengthening the growth model in the wake of its effects (European Union, 2014: vi).

The discursive construction of climate change as potentially catastrophic for stability, security and growth echoes accounts of a *securitization* of climate change (Trombetta, 2008). This is generally understood as framing a particular issue as an existential security threat, thereby legitimizing exceptional policy measures (Trombetta, 2008: 589). It is easy to see how framings of ‘catastrophic’ climate change as a destabilizing force could pave the way for such claims of exceptionality. Yet, GCCA discourse does not fully reflect this. Instead of prescribing exceptional policy measures like conflict prevention, which could be evidence of full-on securitization, this problem definition is met with an intervention logic revolving around the concept of *resilience*. The concept of resilience in GCCA discourse defines adaptation in terms of mitigating climate risk and disaster risk reduction (GCCA, 2015b: 4). It is for example stated that “the GCCA + will help vulnerable countries to prepare for climate-related natural hazards, reduce risks and minimize impacts by integrating multi-sector risk management approaches in national development planning” (GCCA, 2015a: 9). In addition, adaptation strategies should “seek to manage the risk, support developing countries and their populations in building their resilience to climate change impacts” (Council of the European Union, 2009: 2).

Also in relation to climate change as a threat to economic growth and security, GCCA discourse emphasizes the need to mitigate this effect in order to safeguard growth and stability. Regarding the former, this is for example apparent in the increasing emphasis on public-private partnerships and attracting private investments for adaptation. Indeed, one of the aspired improvements in the switch from GCCA to GCCA+, was a stronger involvement of the private sector (GCCA, 2015a: 11). Discursively, this translates into an increasing emphasis on public-private partnerships and building an enabling environment for attracting private investments for financing adaptation (e.g. GCCA, 2012a; 2015b). Regarding the latter, discourse mentions “to use the GCCA to support and strengthen partner countries’ capacities to identify, manage and mitigate security threats posed by climate change” (European Parliament, 2008: 7).

Hence, instead of reflecting a securitization dynamic, this particular rationality can better be described as a ‘riskification’ of climate change (Corry, 2012; Oels, 2013; Judge and Maltby, 2017). This reflects a rationality in which the idea of ‘exceptional politics’ is replaced with a governmental logic based on long-term societal engineering (Corry, 2012: 245). Instead of an acute, external threat, climate change poses a more diffuse and contingent challenge, and thus needs to be governed by minimizing the ‘risk’ of any harmful events in the long term, which could negatively impact both the stability and the growth of affected countries. Moreover, the centrality of ‘risk’ also implicitly highlights the uncertainty that lies at the core of climate change adaptation.

From a governmentality perspective, the discursive construction of adaptation in terms of building resilience and avoiding risk corresponds with the Foucauldian notion of ‘the conduct of conduct’. Behind the discursive veil of ‘assisting’ and ‘helping’ developing countries adapting to climate change, the GCCA sets out clear boundaries within which adaptation is to be understood by GCCA partner states, thus producing real power effects. First of all, it shifts the limelight of providing security, stability and growth towards partner countries themselves, as the locus of ‘dangerous climate change’ is constructed as internal to

GCCA partner countries (Corry, 2012: 252; Joseph, 2014). The threat of climate change lies in the fact that these countries are unable to withstand climate shocks, which could threaten economic growth and geopolitical stability.

Resilience in this regard serves as a discursive tool for further problematizing ‘the local’ as fundamentally lacking capacity, a technique that is also observed in other instances EU external governance (e.g. Æslyen, 2015: 678). Second, the impact that adaptation has on the provider of aid assistance itself tends to be neglected. The GCCA reduces itself to an actor that assists in technical interventions in order to build resilience in partner countries, and silences the transformative potential that adaptation could have for EU development cooperation. Third, the emphasis on climate ‘risk’ and the implicit uncertainty that entails it, serves as a discursive tool for highlighting the need for knowledge creation.

6.2. Technical aspects/forms of knowledge

The previous section identified the political rationalities underpinning the GCCA’s operations as mainly based on notions of risk and resilience. These are much more preoccupied with capacity building in GCCA partner countries, and neglect the impact adaptation might have on EU development aid itself. In this section, this argument will be expanded by pointing at the self-governance effects inherent to the GCCA’s conditions for assistance, which further marginalize any politicized rationalities of adaptation. In order to develop this argument, I will simultaneously discuss the technical aspects of the GCCA’s functioning as well as the forms of knowledge that flow from it, as the two are strongly interlinked.

I will zoom in on three instances of GCCA conditions. First of all, the **GCCA + index** for the measurement and quantification of vulnerability is aimed at establishing a clear-cut definition of climate vulnerability as a basis for comparing potential partner countries. This ‘ranking’ of countries is then used to determine a project proposal’s eligibility to receive GCCA funding: if a project is situated in a more climate-vulnerable country, it is more likely to receive financial and technical assistance (Interview 1). Third parties need to specify their ‘score’ on this index, thereby marking their climate vulnerability according to a Commission-determined formula (GCCA, 2017a).

Second, actors interested in receiving GCCA assistance also have to live up to requirements in terms of **monitoring and evaluation** (M&E) by creating an identification fiche and a logical framework (log frame), consisting out of a number of indicators that allow to measure its impact and outcome. These indicators can be taken from EU-based sources (e.g. the GCCA + -specific log frame or GCCA + index) or from non-EU sources (SDG framework, country-specific frameworks). Although governments are the main partners for GCCA-projects (Interview 2), local stakeholders (research centers, universities etc.) are ought to be consulted to generate knowledge on concrete projects, based on the selected indicators.

GCCA partners have some freedom in selecting their own indicators for a project that they would like to implement. Yet, the knowledge management strategy within the GCCA does strive towards commonality in terms of M&E across projects. Actors are encouraged to use indicators from Commission-based sources in order to generate comparability between projects and to come to a more general understanding of ‘good’ adaptation practices. Although most of knowledge management aspects are described in soft and participatory terms, it is clear the quantification and streamlining of knowledge is an essential part of technical assistance through the GCCA. Sticking to the example of M&E schemes, these are not only an obligation for GCCA supported projects, their diffusion is also a goal in itself. One study explicitly scored GCCA partner countries on the quality of their M&E schemes and logical frameworks for programmes, as well as on their ability to manage climate risks (IIED 2014). The quantification and streamlining of knowledge through such techniques is thus actively promoted and

monitored through the GCCA. In Bhutan for example, improving the quality of statistical data and sectoral monitoring systems has become a criterion for receiving additional tranches of budget support (GCCA, 2015b :37).

This focus on quantification and statistical data is further perpetuated through the emphasis on **upscaling**, which allows for comparison between countries based on their performance in projects, as measured through the described techniques. This exercise is part of the evolution from GCCA to GCCA + and aims to elevate GCCA support from launching pilot projects towards supporting projects with a potential ‘multiplier’ effect, hence generating more impact with only limited funding. Upscaling could imply a continued or enhanced support for previously successful projects or the replication of a successful project template in a different setting (e.g. from the local to the national or regional level). In terms of implications for the partner country itself, this clearly gives the edge towards administrations having the capacity to “implement programmes with larger funding allocations” (GCCA, 2015a: 10). Partners having a larger capacity or having demonstrated their ability to successfully implement projects, inevitably score higher on this criterion for receiving GCCA support. In contrast, smaller states with less capacity are to be assisted through the implementation of larger regional projects, albeit adapted to the local context.

These three instances of GCCA support criteria operationalize the concepts of risk and resilience through surveillance and supervision, and can therefore be considered disciplinary mechanisms for transferring a particular conception of climate vulnerability and ‘good’ adaptation governance towards partner countries (cf. Joseph, 2013). Countries also become the ‘owners’ of their own surveillance and supervision techniques, as they are responsible for designing the implementation modalities that GCCA support requires. Hence, GCCA operations are freedom-based by design, but disciplinary in their effects: partner countries’ autonomy is limited to predefined techniques of adaptation governance, which are technocratic and depoliticized in nature.

Regarding the GCCA + index, it should be stated that it does contain some indicators on socio-economic drivers of vulnerability, which at a more structural, politicized understanding of the concept (European Commission, 2015). Yet, the transformative potential of these considerations is trumped by their quantified representation in a single vulnerability ‘score’. As a result, determining vulnerability becomes a mere technique for rendering potential partner countries eligible for assistance, instead of serving as a vector for truly considering any structural causes in this regard. Hence, the process of measuring vulnerability shapes the understanding of the phenomenon itself (Merry and Conley, 2011: 84).

The use of M&E schemes is even more testimonial in this regard. Practices of M&E, as well as the use of log frames have been problematized before from a governmentality perspective. Critics argue that these are central components of a ‘development aesthetic’ that disciplines partner countries into accepting and reproducing technocratic and depoliticized rationalities of development (Gould, 2008). The fact that these tools are now transposed to the context of the climate-development nexus once again signifies how little ‘change’ the concept of adaptation truly embodies in the context of the GCCA. By installing the creation of a M&E framework as a criterion for receiving assistance, the agency again puts itself in the driver’s seat to determine what is considered ‘successful’ adaptation, the knowledge necessary in order to determine this and the capacity needed to produce this particular knowledge. Yet, as pointed out above, the knowledge production itself can be done by partner countries and local partners, which allows for claiming that the dissemination of these M&E schemes is in fact a participatory process. However, since the process is increasingly streamlined in order to allow for mutual comparability of adaptation projects, it merely creates a situation in which local realities of adaptation are to be translated into predefined notions of adaptation that are preeminently depoliticized.

Finally, the idea of ‘upscaling’ further socializes potential partner countries in accepting and reproducing this depoliticized and technocratic rationalities of adaptation. If countries have successfully internalized these rationalities and adequately produce the knowledge products as envisioned by the Commission, they are more likely to receive further GCCA assistance in order to ‘scale-up’ their projects. As such, the capacity of partner countries to become adequate managers of their own adaptation is at least as important as their climate vulnerability for receiving GCCA assistance.

6.3. Formation of identities

the three policy techniques outlined in the previous section clearly pointed at a positivist and technocratic operationalization of adaptation assistance, which further represent the nexus as an objective and apolitical sphere of governance, thereby erasing any structural or political conditions from the equation (Escobar, 1995; İşleyen, 2015). In this section, I argue that these policy techniques and acts of knowledge creation do not only produce socialization effects among partner countries, but also serve as tools for the GCCA and the EU to reproduce their identity as leading actors in this regard. As such, I will specifically zoom in on the formation of a stable identity for the EU, as I believe this sheds a new and important new light on the role conception of EU climate leadership.

The need for a ‘consistent identity’ and a ‘branding’ of the GCCA is strongly articulated in a dedicated strategy on communication and knowledge management (2012: 3). Take for instance the overarching objectives of the strategy, which clearly state that acquired knowledge should be used for “promoting the visibility and a positive perception of the GCCA initiative” (ibid.). This clearly shows that knowledge building is mainly framed in function of establishing the GCCA initiative as an established center of expertise, and that the knowledge management and communication objectives are closely intertwined. The strategy goes on saying that “for the GCCA, communication and knowledge management are closely linked and feed into each other. Knowledge building based on achievements and results is at the core of GCCA communication, which aims to base its credibility on implementation results, and also to increase its impact through the use of thorough and evidence-based communication” (GCCA, 2012b: 6).

In the same vein, the creation of a GCCA + index for quantifying vulnerability not only puts the power of defining what vulnerability constitutes squarely within the EU itself, it also serves as a tool for establishing and reproducing the social relevance of the organization as a whole. One example in this regard is the dedicated annex in the GCCA orientation package – which serves as a crash course in how the GCCA functions and how to become eligible for technical/financial assistance – which includes guidelines for actors to communicate success stories and even mentions the ‘legal obligation’ of this communication exercise (GCCA, 2017b).

This identity building exercise is exemplary of two larger observations: first of all, the objective of creating a positive perception of the GCCA towards third actors illustrates that the EU itself is also ‘governed’ by the observed overarching rationalities on how adaptation mainstreaming should be pursued. Hence, these technocratic knowledge production techniques do not only encapsulate power effects towards GCCA partner countries, but also towards the organization itself (Freistein, 2016): the GCCA clearly operates within the parameters of dominant rationalities in both development cooperation and climate governance (cf. supra), and clearly attempts at using the ‘knowledge products’ fabricated based on these rationalities to communicate its own added value, both within as well as outside of the EU. Regarding the former, EU member states like Germany and France prefer to channel their funding through other – bigger – organizations like the World Bank, instead of the GCCA (Colebourn, 2011: 4). Thus, also vis-à-vis EU member states, this knowledge management objective aims to establish the GCCA as an added value in terms of climate financing

(GCCA, 2012b).

Second, and more importantly, this identity building exercise also serves to reproduce the EU's role as a climate leader (e.g. [European Union, 2011](#): 4; [GCCA, 2018](#): 4; 12). Arguably, the identified rationalities and policy techniques shed new and interesting light on this leadership role conception: first, the centrality of concepts like resilience does imply that non-industrialized countries need to adapt to a future world in which the impacts of climate change are rendered inevitable. The discursive introduction and use of resilience in the framing of adaptation in non-industrialized countries erases any alternative geopolitical future in which climate change is timely halted, and a present in which the inevitability of the outcomes of climate change remain contestable ([Methmann and Oels, 2015](#): 64). Although the necessity of adaptation assistance is not contested, I do argue that resilience can become a vector through which the margins of the climate change debate are slowly moved away from pursuing ambitious mitigation towards accepting increasing levels of global warming. The fact that the EU's mitigation ambitions are increasingly criticized as not living up to the goals set by the Paris Agreement ([Rueter and Russel, 2017](#); [van der Heijden et al., 2017](#)), makes this observation all the more relevant.

In addition, even within the margins of adaptation itself, the claim of climate leadership does not add up with the scale and the nature of assistance. Based on the above, it is safe to say that adaptation is by no means a transformative issue in the GCCA's activities. Hence, using this to claim leadership in adaptation as well further confirms the idea of mainstreaming being essentially an empty shell, that in many ways serves as a justification for prolonging the status-quo ([Methmann, 2010](#)). True normative leadership would imply the EU using the concept of adaptation to fundamentally rethink the rationalities that drive its development activities, as well as considering its own role in some of the structural causes that render GCCA partner countries vulnerable to climate change in the first place. Such implications of course goes far beyond the mandate of a thematic agency like the GCCA. Yet, it could serve as a policy entrepreneur for introducing such politicized understandings of adaptation within the realm of EU development policy. In its current form however, EU adaptation assistance through the GCCA is entirely depoliticized and focused on the responsabilization of partner countries.

7. Discussion and conclusions

This article aimed to critically engage with assistance to adaptation within EU development cooperation, through the Global Climate Change Alliance (GCCA). By using a governmentality approach, the analysis revealed power to be inherently present in both the discursive rationalities that promote a certain way of governing adaptation in the context of aid activities, as well as the policy techniques and forms of knowledge that are deemed eligible in this regard. In general, the GCCA stands for a technocratic, depoliticized and risk-based conception of adaptation assistance. This is operationalized through disciplinary criteria for partner countries, which are in essence aimed at promoting a managerial attitude towards adaptation projects. Not only are they supposed to 'score' their own climate vulnerability, partner countries also need to generate the capacity to translate local adaptation realities into quantified and mutually comparable knowledge products. As such, this completely deprives adaptation of any transformative potential: structural and politico-economic causes of adaptation are completely sidelined, while the role of the EU itself in perpetuating such factors is also left out of the equation.

The findings presented in this article echo many of the findings of earlier governmentality analyses in the fields of international climate governance and development cooperation. Regarding the latter, the depiction of climate vulnerability in GCCA discourse strongly resembles constructions of underdevelopment and poverty as identified by authors like [Ferguson \(1994\)](#) and [Li \(2007\)](#). Both highlight the individual

responsibility of targeted actors in dealing with the issue at hand, and both render it technocratic and void of structural/political causes. In this sense, this article adds to the understanding of how elusive rationalities of risk and resilience perpetuate existing governance paradigms. Moreover, development-based policy techniques are also perpetuated in this new 'frontier' of policy making, which is for example clearly reflected in the use of M&E frameworks for building knowledge on 'successful' adaptation.

The GCCA's promotion of a managerial attitude towards adaptation governance also clearly reflects aspects of 'green governmentality', for example through the centralization of a science-based approach. The discourse of ecological modernization is also reflected in the political rationalities of the GCCA, in the form of a strong emphasis on climate change as a threat to economic growth, and in the conception of adaptation as a way of maintaining this growth rationale. In sum, there is plenty of evidence to conclude that behind the veil of 'innovative' policy making within the GCCA lies a notion of adaptation that perpetuates existing political rationalities in this regard. As a result, this article further confirms similar critiques that point at a depoliticization of the nexus, which is first and foremost a continuation of the business-as-usual ([Methmann, 2010](#); [Bracking, 2015](#); [Remling, 2018](#)).

Yet, through identifying this dynamic in the case of the GCCA, this article not only provided a new empirical account of power effects hidden within the governance of the climate-development nexus, but also shed new and important light on the concept of EU climate leadership. Although scholarly work that critically engages with the power effects of EU external governance is bulking ([İşleyen, 2015](#); [Joseph, 2014](#); [Kurki, 2010](#); [Merlingen, 2011](#)), the literature on EU external climate governance has so far not followed suit. The insights provided regarding this specific instance of EU external climate 'leadership' could give new impetus to the literature in this regard. As shown in this analysis, the concept of governmentality provides researchers with a new yardstick for evaluating the innovativity and ambition of EU policy making within the realm of international climate governance. Instead of focusing exclusively on EU policy mechanisms or institutional aspects, the literature could also engage with the underlying political rationalities that drive different aspects of it. Is the EU able to shift the margins of the debate on what is considered the 'truth' on climate governance, and the logical policy prescriptions that follow from it? Or is itself a 'norm-taker' within the international sphere, reproducing and legitimizing existing political rationalities, like this article has pointed out in the case of the GCCA. This additional 'layer' of understanding this role conception could give a new depth to the literature, and certainly add more nuance to the debate.

Of course, this analysis could be extended by looking specifically at the implementation of GCCA projects in partner countries. This could not only expand our understanding of how the power effects described in this article translate to the very micro-level of an adaptation project, but could also identify possible acts of resistance. Foucault himself clearly stated that logics of governance are always incomplete and very much dependent on the complex context in which they are implemented. Therefore, acts of resistance, involving re-interpretations of certain dominant rationalities, the tweaking of certain governmental techniques or downright refusals to accept certain 'truths' on adaptation could greatly improve our understanding of how 'the art of government' morphs depending on the setting in which it is introduced.

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Declaration of interests

None.

List of interviews

No	Date	Function
1	23/5/2017	GCCA Official
2	25/9/2017	GCCA official
3	5/10/2017	EEAS Official
4	4/1/2018	DG CLIMA Official

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