

Oxford Climate Policy Blog

Initiating debates on international climate policy

Quo Vadis COP.31?

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The UN climate negotiations are recognized as essential in the global fight against climate change, praised for what they have achieved, but at the same time derided for the complexity, enormity and slow pace of progress.

A fundamental problem with the mega-events which the Conference of Parties (COP) sessions have turned into over recent years – for a detailed analysis of this evolution see the recently updated ecbi Report on *Future Arrangements for Intergovernmental Meetings under the UNFCCC – Settled and Fit for Purpose* – is that fewer and fewer countries, in particular the poorest and most vulnerable ones, are able to host such mega-events, and hence do not put themselves forward to take on the role of COP-Presidency. This, in turn, deprives them of an important tool to bring their unique perspectives to the debate and guide the agenda towards their immediate and urgent concerns such as loss and damage from adverse impacts of climate change.

The ecbi Report divides the mega-COPs into a 'Triad' of events: 'Negotiations', 'Summits', and 'Expos'. '**Negotiations**' in that context refers to the sessions of the governing and subsidiary bodies of the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement.



"Family photograph" of the COP 28 Summit in Dubai

'Summits' are the gatherings of heads of state and government which in the last few years have regularly been added to the COPs.



Expo City, Dubai

The term ‘Expo’, used in deference to the COP28 venue (Expo City, Dubai), finally, refers to the wide range of climate action events in the multilateral “Blue Zone” and the host country “Green Zone”. The latter is the space for non-governmental organizations, the private sector, and civil society to advocate, showcase innovations, and create alliances and collaborations to support implementation. This broadly construed “Expo” of late also includes the ever-increasing number of pavilions (paid for and hosted by countries and others).

The statistical analysis in the ecbi Report has shown that if the Negotiations are removed from the Summits and Expos, their ‘stand-alone’ size is predicted to reduce to below 5000 participants, which could be hosted by any country, large or small.

As regards COP.31, Australia, for example, could offer to take on the COP Presidency in collaboration with the Pacific Island Forum (PIF) member countries, and share out the hosting of the Triad-events between them. This would help to overcome the exclusion problem as all PIF members could host stand-alone Negotiations (while not all might be able to host a Summit or a mega-Expo).



Members of the Pacific Island Forum

In demonstrating that stand-alone Negotiations could indeed be hosted by any country, such a collaborative COP.31 could reassure countries that they could host them and thus encourage them to put themselves forward for future COP Presidencies. Summits and/or Expos, if deemed necessary, could then be hosted re-

gionally, following the proposed COP.31 collaboration model.

At the end of the day, the ideal solution in our mind would still be to hold the COP Negotiations at the UNFCCC Headquarters in Bonn regardless of who has the Presidency, as happened at COP.23 under the Presidency of Fiji (with the remaining “triad” events taking place in other places). But the main thing at this point is to start holding them as stand-alone events.

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One thought on “Quo Vadis COP.31?”

Philip SEN

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Unfortunately a Pacific COP31 is still in limbo as we await a federal election here in Australia. It’s generally believed that Turkiye will only decide whether to back down on its own bid once we know who will sit in Canberra.

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