

An Inter- and Multi-disciplinary Approach to Ocean Climate Governance: An Introduction

George Dikaïos 

Institute of Political Science, Leiden University, The Netherlands

Correspondence: George Dikaïos (g.dikaïos@fsw.leidenuniv.nl)

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Abstract

This editorial introduces the thematic issue Ocean Climate Governance: Eclectic Viewpoints of a Multi-dimensional Nexus. Ocean governance is gradually being connected to climate governance, as there is an understanding that climate change leads to oceanic change. This connection needs to be evolved in an inter- and multi-disciplinary approach, as ocean governance entails all human activities that occur in the seas and, as such, diverse disciplines ought to be in conversation with each other for comprehensive solutions to be developed. The six articles of this thematic issue approach the ocean climate governance nexus from their own viewpoints, while collectively they aspire to begin an open dialogue that will lead the way to an all-encompassing ocean governance.

Keywords

climate governance; interdisciplinarity; multi-disciplinarity; ocean-climate nexus; ocean governance

1. Introduction

The interrelation between ocean and climate (governance) has been gaining significant attention and systematic interest in the last few years. Indeed, during the 25th Conference of the Parties (COP) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 2019, the first (informal) discussions on a diplomatic level regarding the nexus between climate and oceans took place. This marked the first official attempt to bring two subjects that are intrinsically linked under the same institutional-climate umbrella (Chan, 2021) and to overcome the reality that “climate and ocean policies have been historically siloed” (Dobush et al., 2022, p. 254) and largely disconnected (Barros-Plataiu et al., 2023; Borg, 2023; Morgera et al., 2023). Nevertheless, although several pledges for blue action have taken place since then, during COP30 in 2025, it was emphatically apparent that the silos still remained in place, as

no mention of oceans—which play a crucial role in tackling climate change—was made in the final output (Garcia-Soto, 2026).

The reason for this, according to Garcia-Soto (2026, p. 1), is that “the UNFCCC system lacks the mechanisms needed to integrate ocean science into core decision-making.” This fact highlights the common criticism against the fragmentation of the international governance system regarding climate change (Zelli, 2011), a criticism that has been made with more intensity about the oceans (Barros-Platiau et al., 2023; Chan, 2021). This thematic issue explores a series of very different cases in order to highlight and showcase the extensive influence that the efforts to combat the effects of climate change have immediate effects on ocean governance.

According to the literature, ocean governance covers the totality of the institutional arrangements that govern human activity regarding the seas and the oceans. For example, Mondré and Kuhn (2022, p. 6) define ocean governance “as all rules, policies, laws, and institutions designed by governmental and/or non-governmental actors on all levels of decision-making, which regulate any human activities concerning the sea.” They also make an interesting claim/observation on the form of ocean governance, which is simultaneously twofold: spatial and sectoral (Mondré & Kuhn, 2022). For Haas et al. (2022, p. 254), “oceans are governed by numerous actors, formal and informal institutions, and nation-states, for a variety of often conflicting services and uses.”

The above is apparent in the literature that vastly claims that the current—significantly complex and fragmented—governance structure and institutional arrangements regarding the oceans have led to the failure of protecting the marine environment and, at the same time, put obstacles to the evolution of a substantive transition to a sustainable ocean governance (Brodie Rudolph et al., 2020; Craig, 2012; Mondré & Kuhn, 2022; Stephens, 2022). This is even more true for efforts to combine climate action with ocean governance. The six articles of the thematic issue shed light on different angles through diverse perspectives in this relation, with the aim of further understanding the Byzantine nature of ocean climate governance.

2. Presentation of the Contributions in this Thematic Issue

This thematic issue followed a novel, for a scholarly journal, process of putting together articles that do not come from a single discipline. The contributions, therefore, cover a broad array of disciplines; in particular, they emanate from political science and international relations, economics, maritime economics and maritime studies, geography, and sociology. The term *governance*, which in the case of the oceans encompasses every action that takes place in the seas, acts as the connecting link among the different approaches. The lineup of the articles follows a geographical order: it begins at the local level, then goes to the national, the transnational, the regional, and, lastly, the international.

Avrami et al. (2026), in their article, unpack the stance of the local population of three small islands at the western end of Greece (the Diapontian islands) regarding the installation of offshore wind farms. Offshore wind farms are considered to be a significant tool in the efforts to decarbonize and are being promoted by the EU to achieve climate neutrality. The article highlights the importance of the interrelation between social, economic, and environmental aspects of such efforts in order, first, to convince local communities of the benefits of such a change and, second, to ensure its effectiveness.

Gavalas et al. (2026) focus on the green transition of the Greek coastal shipping services, with an emphasis on electrification and hybridization. The article discusses the lessons that Greece can take from Norway's example and employs two pilot case studies (Salamina–Perama and Chios–Oinousses) with the aim of presenting a scalable proposal for the introduction of electric and hybrid vessels to the Greek maritime connectivity grid, which will eventually lead to the decarbonization of the shipping sector.

Papadaki et al. (2026) emphasize the importance and the added value of projects (funded by the EU) in bringing together different stakeholders through participatory and system-based approaches to tackle shared challenges that have to do with the broad spectrum of the blue economy. The article utilizes the example of the Black Sea to unveil how different “blue” activities suffer from a series of barriers mostly attributed to governance issues, as well as to provide several solutions with the aim of developing a plan for sustainable blue action that could also be applied elsewhere.

Poersch (2026) performs an extended event ethnography to understand the influence of the UN Ocean Decade's vision on its realization in the North Sea. Through spheres of performance, the article examines different scenarios, projects, and impacts of developing blue policies, based on the experiences of key stakeholders in several events, such as the European Maritime Days, the Norwegian University of Science and Technology Ocean Weeks, and other regional and local meetings. The main argument of the article is that ocean governance events present similar characteristics in their spatial, temporal, and normative aspects.

Nantsou et al. (2026) delve into the issue of climate-induced migration from the Global South towards Europe through the Mediterranean Sea. The article presents data that challenges the dominant narrative that wants migrants fleeing their countries for other reasons (such as conflicts, human rights violations, poverty, etc.), by adding an important layer of climate and environmental factors, which are prevalent through extreme weather events. The article argues that climate-related mobility exists, is multifaceted, and calls for further action at all levels to ensure enhanced protection.

Dikaïos et al. (2026) take as a starting point the growing use of the term “geopolitics,” both in general and in the sphere of the shipping sector, and investigate the (potential) consequences of the decisions made by the International Maritime Organization and the EU regarding shipping decarbonization. The article focuses on maritime trade and on (alternative) fuel supply and explores the changes through the lens of geopolitics influenced by climate change, i.e., *climate geopolitics*, in an attempt to understand the analytical value of the term.

3. Conclusion

The thematic issue Ocean Climate Governance: Eclectic Viewpoints of a Multi-dimensional Nexus comes to add further research to the emerging literature on the attempts to understand, as well as to construct, a new notion of ocean governance impacted by climate change (e.g., Harris, 2019; Partelow et al., 2023). The thematic issue brings together scholars from across the social sciences in order to underscore the importance of inter- and multi-disciplinarity, which still lacks the necessary impetus to evolve. If the goal is to overcome the silos between climate and ocean governance, then the same applies to scientific knowledge and research. Bringing together work from diverse disciplines that undertake research on similar subjects from their own epistemological field might allow for further connections to be developed, potential

collaborations, and, ultimately, possibly better solutions. Through unveiling this fragmented reality, the goal is to also open the discussion for the convergence of the scientific grid, if the desideratum is to advance an ocean governance that would serve the needs of coexistence of the (marine) environmental protection and human activities. The argument of this thematic issue is that this advancement can happen through the local, regional, national, and international efforts to combat climate change and to implement a substantial green transition and sustainable development.

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Conflict of Interests

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About the Author



George Dikaïos is a Marie Skłodowska-Curie individual fellow at the Institute of Political Science at Leiden University. He is also a senior research fellow of the UNESCO Chair on Climate Diplomacy (at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens) and the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP). His first book is *EU Climate Diplomacy Towards the IMO and ICAO* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2024).