
International Environmental Law in Times of Multilateral Crisis: Brief Reflections to Global Environmental Governance

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Abstract

This article examines the evolution of International Environmental Law within the context of the contemporary crisis of multilateralism and the transformation of global governance structures. The study argues that environmental governance increasingly reflects the tensions between sovereign interests, geopolitical fragmentation, economic nationalism, and the urgent need for coordinated responses to global ecological threats. The paper analyses how International Environmental Law has progressively incorporated flexible and polycentric governance arrangements involving non-state actors, subnational governments, scientific institutions, and transnational networks. Simultaneously, it evaluates the institutional limitations currently affecting the multilateral system, particularly in climate governance. The article sustains that the crisis of multilateralism does not necessarily imply the collapse of international cooperation; rather, it signals a functional reconfiguration of authority, legitimacy, and norm production in global environmental governance. In this scenario, International Environmental Law emerges as a pragmatic and result-oriented branch of law that increasingly relies upon soft law instruments, collaborative governance mechanisms, environmental paradiplomacy, and multi-level regulatory arrangements. This article adopts a qualitative and interdisciplinary methodology based on bibliographical and documentary research. It analyses specialised literature, international legal instruments, and recent studies on International Environmental Law, global governance, and the crisis of multilateralism. The research follows an analytical and descriptive approach focused on the transformation of environmental governance structures. The paper concludes that the future effectiveness of International Environmental Law depends upon the capacity of international institutions and actors to reconcile sovereignty with ecological interdependence, strengthening cooperative frameworks capable of responding to the complex environmental challenges of the twenty-first century.

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Keywords

International Environmental Law; Global Environmental Governance; Crisis of Multilateralism; Environmental Paradplomacy; Climate Governance.

Direito Ambiental Internacional em Tempos de Crise do Multilateralismo: Breves Reflexões para a Governança Ambiental Global

Resumo

Este artigo examina a evolução do Direito Ambiental Internacional no contexto da crise contemporânea do multilateralismo e da transformação das estruturas de governança global. O estudo sustenta que a governança ambiental reflete cada vez mais as tensões entre interesses soberanos, fragmentação geopolítica, nacionalismo econômico e a necessidade urgente de respostas coordenadas às ameaças ecológicas globais. Analisa-se como o Direito Ambiental Internacional incorporou progressivamente arranjos de governança flexíveis e policêntricos envolvendo atores não estatais, governos subnacionais, instituições científicas e redes transnacionais, ao mesmo tempo em que são avaliadas as limitações institucionais que atualmente afetam o sistema multilateral, especialmente na governança climática. O artigo defende que a crise do multilateralismo não implica necessariamente o colapso da cooperação internacional; ao contrário, sinaliza uma reconfiguração funcional da autoridade, da legitimidade e da produção normativa na governança ambiental global. Nesse cenário, o Direito Ambiental Internacional emerge como um ramo pragmático e orientado a resultados, cada vez mais dependente de instrumentos de *soft law*, mecanismos colaborativos de governança, paradiplomacia ambiental e arranjos regulatórios multinível. Metodologicamente, o artigo adota uma abordagem qualitativa e interdisciplinar, baseada em pesquisa bibliográfica e documental, combinando literatura especializada, instrumentos jurídicos internacionais e estudos recentes sobre governança global e multilateralismo. O trabalho conclui que a efetividade futura do Direito Ambiental Internacional dependerá da capacidade das instituições e atores internacionais de conciliar soberania com interdependência ecológica, fortalecendo estruturas cooperativas aptas a enfrentar os complexos desafios ambientais do século XXI.

Palavras-Chave

Direito Ambiental Internacional; Governança Ambiental Global; Crise do Multilateralismo; Paradiplomacia Ambiental; Governança Climática.

1_INTRODUCTION

The international agenda has increasingly been marked by instability regarding the accomplishment of collective results and the effectiveness of multilateral cooperation (Rei, 2018; Weiss et al., 2018). Such instability derives not only from the inherent complexity of the international environment itself, but also from the continuous transformation of international relations and the growing diversification of actors participating in global governance processes. In this context, law cannot remain indifferent to the structural transformations affecting the international order.

The contemporary international system is characterised by simultaneous crises involving climate change, biodiversity loss, forced migration, food insecurity, energy transition, pandemics, geopolitical conflicts, and economic fragmentation. These crises demonstrate the inadequacy of traditional unilateral approaches to global problems and reveal the growing interdependence among states, societies, science, markets, and ecosystems. As a consequence, the effectiveness of international regulation increasingly depends upon the capacity of states and non-state actors to cooperate through institutional arrangements capable of coordinating collective action.

Moving forward with this agenda requires the consolidation of governance structures that involve not only sovereign states, but also international organisations, subnational governments, scientific institutions, corporations, indigenous peoples, non-governmental organisations, and transnational networks. Environmental governance, in particular, has become one of the most visible areas in which the participation of these new actors has progressively expanded.

The growing complexity of environmental problems derives from the fact that ecological systems do not correspond to political boundaries (Andonova & Mitchell, 2010). Climate change, marine pollution, biodiversity loss, atmospheric degradation, and water insecurity constitute interconnected challenges whose causes and consequences transcend state frontiers. Consequently, environmental governance increasingly demands coordinated institutional responses based upon cooperation, shared responsibility, and scientific knowledge.

Simultaneously, the international order currently faces a profound crisis of multilateralism (Ikenberry, 2018; Patrick, 2023). The rise of nationalist political

movements, geopolitical disputes among major powers, economic protectionism, and institutional fragmentation have weakened confidence in international organisations and complicated the negotiation of collective solutions. Environmental governance has been directly affected by these developments, particularly regarding climate negotiations and the implementation of sustainable development commitments.

Nevertheless, environmental governance also reveals important processes of institutional innovation (Chang *et al.*, 2022). The emergence of flexible governance arrangements, soft law instruments, polycentric governance structures, and transnational cooperation networks demonstrates that the weakening of traditional multilateralism has not eliminated the search for cooperative solutions. Rather, it has accelerated the diversification of governance mechanisms and redistributed authority across multiple actors and institutional levels.

The environmental agenda therefore occupies a central position within contemporary international law because it exposes the tension between sovereignty and ecological interdependence. The increasing awareness that no state can effectively confront global environmental threats alone has progressively transformed the foundations of international cooperation.

In this context, International Environmental Law has undergone profound transformation. Rather than remaining confined to traditional treaty-based interstate relations, it has evolved into a dynamic and pragmatic branch of law characterised by interdisciplinary approaches, governance experimentation, and increasing participation by non-state actors (Rei, Granziera, 2015).

This article examines the evolution of International Environmental Law within the broader framework of the crisis of multilateralism and global environmental governance. It argues that the current fragmentation of international cooperation has accelerated the development of polycentric governance systems, soft law instruments, environmental paradiplomacy, and multi-level regulatory arrangements. Although multilateralism faces significant challenges, the environmental field simultaneously demonstrates the resilience and adaptability of international cooperation mechanisms.

The article further argues that International Environmental Law increasingly constitutes a pragmatic and result-oriented branch of legal science, strongly influenced by scientific knowledge, international relations, ecological complexity, and governance experimentation. Rather than representing the decline of international law, the current crisis of multilateralism may be understood as a process of functional reconfiguration in which authority and regulatory capacity become distributed across multiple actors and governance scales.

The purpose of this article, therefore, is not merely to discuss the new approaches introduced by International Environmental Law, but also to analyse how the contemporary crisis of multilateralism has influenced the transformation of global environmental governance and the evolution of international legal structures themselves.

This article adopts a qualitative and interdisciplinary methodology grounded in bibliographical and documentary research. The study is based upon the analysis of specialised literature in International Environmental Law, Global Governance, International Relations, and Environmental Governance, combining classical and contemporary theoretical approaches. In addition, the research examines international legal instruments, multilateral environmental agreements, reports issued by international organisations, and recent academic contributions concerning the crisis of multilateralism and polycentric governance. The methodological approach is predominantly analytical and descriptive, seeking to evaluate the transformation of International Environmental Law within the context of contemporary global environmental challenges and the reconfiguration of multilateral governance structures

2_ INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL LAW AS A DYNAMIC BRANCH OF LEGAL SCIENCE IN TRANSITION

The contemporary international order has increasingly been shaped by geopolitical fragmentation, institutional instability, and declining confidence in multilateral cooperation mechanisms. Climate change, biodiversity loss, energy insecurity, pandemics, forced migration, and food crises reveal not only the interconnected nature of global risks, but also the growing limitations of traditional interstate governance structures in producing effective collective responses. While liberal institutionalist approaches traditionally emphasised the capacity of international organisations to foster cooperation, current geopolitical tensions and the resurgence of nationalist and sovereigntist agendas have exposed the fragility of consensus-based multilateralism (Ikenberry, 2018; Patrick, 2023).

Within this scenario, the environmental agenda occupies a particularly paradoxical position. On the one hand, ecological interdependence increasingly demonstrates that environmental degradation cannot be addressed through isolated state action, especially in relation to climate change, biodiversity protection, and transboundary pollution. On the other hand, the very complexity of environmental problems has intensified disputes concerning sovereignty, differentiated responsibilities, economic development, and technological asymmetries between developed and developing

countries. As Dyer (2022) observes, ecological interdependence directly challenges classical conceptions of sovereignty, yet states continue to resist limitations upon their regulatory autonomy.

In response to these tensions, International Environmental Law has progressively evolved beyond the traditional treaty-based and state-centred model of international law. It increasingly incorporates governance arrangements involving subnational governments, international organisations, scientific institutions, corporations, indigenous peoples, civil society organisations, and transnational networks (Rei & Granziera, 2015). According to Alter (2023), this transformation reflects a broader reconfiguration of authority and legitimacy within international law itself, in which regulatory influence is no longer exercised exclusively by sovereign states.

However, this process remains far from consensual. Advocates of polycentric and flexible governance argue that the diversification of actors and regulatory mechanisms increases institutional adaptability, encourages experimentation, and facilitates environmental cooperation under conditions of political fragmentation (Celis, 2023). Conversely, critics contend that the expansion of soft law instruments, voluntary commitments, and decentralised governance arrangements may contribute to normative fragmentation, weakened accountability, and the erosion of binding international obligations. From this perspective, excessive flexibility may ultimately privilege political pragmatism over legal certainty and regulatory effectiveness.

In this context, International Environmental Law has undergone significant transformation. No longer restricted to classic treaty-based intergovernmental relations, it now incorporates increasingly complex governance structures involving subnational governments, international organisations, transnational networks, scientific communities, corporations, indigenous peoples, civil society organisations, and other non-state actors (Rei, Granziera, 2015). This process reflects a broader redefinition of authority and legitimacy within international law itself (Alter, 2023).

The contemporary environmental agenda demonstrates that ecological interdependence challenges traditional conceptions of sovereignty (Dyer, 2022). Climate change, in particular, reveals the inadequacy of purely state-centred approaches to global environmental regulation. Consequently, new institutional arrangements and governance models have emerged to complement traditional multilateralism, fostering more flexible and adaptive forms of cooperation.

The current fragmentation of international cooperation has accelerated the development of polycentric governance systems, soft law instruments, environmental paradiplomacy, and multi-level regulatory arrangements (Celis, 2023). Although

multilateralism faces significant challenges, the environmental field simultaneously demonstrates the resilience and adaptability of international cooperation mechanisms.

In this context, International Environmental Law increasingly constitutes a pragmatic and result-oriented branch of legal science, strongly influenced by scientific knowledge, ecological complexity, and governance experimentation. Rather than representing the decline of international law, the current crisis of multilateralism may be understood as a process of functional reconfiguration in which authority and regulatory capacity become distributed across multiple actors and governance scales.

3_ INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL LAW AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF MULTILATERALISM

Mankind has experienced devastating natural catastrophes that have frequently been intensified by anthropogenic activities and unsustainable development models. Alongside these catastrophic events, multiple simultaneous processes of environmental degradation have progressively generated unprecedented ecological challenges for international law and global governance.

In these circumstances, it becomes essential to engage actively in the search for new institutional and legal mechanisms capable of addressing environmental threats while strengthening global governance structures intended to preserve ecological stability. International Environmental Law emerges precisely within this historical context.

International Environmental Law may be understood as a dynamic and evolving branch of legal science developed from both the evolution and the limitations of the traditional international law of the environment (Rei, 2018; Dupuy & Viñuales, 2018). It increasingly constitutes an autonomous field characterised by specific principles, actors, governance arrangements, and regulatory instruments.

Its conceptual foundations derive from the recognition that classical international law, predominantly centred upon sovereign state relations, proved insufficient to address complex environmental problems requiring long-term, cooperative, and scientifically informed responses (Rei, Granziera, 2015).

Unlike traditional international law, International Environmental Law is strongly influenced by scientific uncertainty, ecological interdependence, and technological evolution (Weiss, 1993; Beyerlin & Marauhn, 2011). It therefore incorporates interdisciplinary approaches that combine legal reasoning with environmental sciences, economics, political science, international relations, and governance studies.

This transformation reflects the broader evolution of international society itself. Contemporary international relations are no longer exclusively structured around

sovereign states (Lake, 2003). International organisations, scientific institutions, corporations, cities, indigenous communities, financial actors, and civil society organisations increasingly participate in global decision-making processes.

As noted by numerous scholars, including Keohane and Nye, transnational relations have progressively altered the structure of international politics by expanding the range of relevant actors and increasing interdependence among societies (Keohane & Nye, 1971).

Environmental governance illustrates this transformation particularly clearly. Climate change, marine biodiversity protection, deforestation, and atmospheric pollution cannot be adequately regulated through isolated state action. These problems require governance systems capable of coordinating multiple actors across different territorial and institutional scales.

The Millennium Development Goals and, subsequently, the Sustainable Development Goals represent important examples of this transformation (United Nations, 2015). They demonstrate the emergence of global agendas centred upon sustainability, social inclusion, and collective responsibility, involving not only states but also international organisations, local governments, scientific institutions, and civil society.

However, the evolution of International Environmental Law occurs simultaneously with the contemporary crisis of multilateralism. The optimistic institutionalism that characterised the post-Cold War period has progressively given way to a more fragmented international order marked by geopolitical rivalry, strategic nationalism, economic competition, and institutional distrust.

Current multilateral negotiations frequently reveal profound disagreements. These tensions complicate the construction of universal binding agreements and limit the effectiveness of traditional international legal mechanisms.

Nevertheless, International Environmental Law has demonstrated remarkable adaptive capacity. Rather than depending exclusively upon rigid treaty obligations, environmental governance increasingly relies upon flexible governance structures, soft law instruments, transparency mechanisms, peer review processes, and collaborative frameworks.

The Paris Agreement represents one of the clearest examples of this institutional transformation (Falkner, 2016; Held & Roger, 2018). Instead of imposing uniform top-down obligations, the Agreement adopts a more flexible governance model based upon nationally determined contributions, transparency procedures, periodic stocktaking, and progressive ambition cycles.

This governance architecture reflects the political reality of contemporary multilateralism. In a fragmented international system characterised by divergent interests and asymmetrical capacities, flexible and adaptive governance structures frequently prove more politically viable than rigid universal obligations (De Carvalho, 2025).

Furthermore, International Environmental Law increasingly incorporates the precautionary principle, adaptive governance mechanisms, and iterative institutional arrangements capable of responding to evolving scientific knowledge and ecological uncertainty.

Scientific uncertainty remains one of the defining characteristics of environmental governance (Weiss, 1993). Human understanding of ecological systems, climate dynamics, biodiversity interactions, and environmental risks continues to evolve. Consequently, international legal instruments require sufficient flexibility to adapt to changing scientific evidence and technological capacities.

This characteristic distinguishes International Environmental Law from more traditional branches of international law. Rather than focusing exclusively upon formal legal obligation and state consent, environmental governance increasingly emphasises cooperation, monitoring, implementation, participation, and effectiveness.

In this sense, International Environmental Law may be understood as a more pragmatic and result-oriented branch of legal science, strongly concerned with achieving practical environmental outcomes rather than merely establishing formal legal norms. Inspired by the reflections of Thool (2023), it may be argued that the contemporary crisis of multilateralism does not represent the exhaustion of International Environmental Law, but rather a transformative moment in its evolution. Faced with geopolitical fragmentation, institutional distrust, and growing nationalist tendencies, International Environmental Law increasingly reveals its adaptive and pragmatic character, relying upon flexible governance arrangements, scientific cooperation, and multi-level participation. In this context, the future legitimacy and effectiveness of environmental governance will depend less upon rigid institutional structures and more upon the capacity of international actors to construct cooperative frameworks grounded in ecological interdependence, shared responsibility, and global solidarity.

4_ THE CRISIS OF MULTILATERALISM AND GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE

Since the Stockholm Conference of 1972 and the Rio Conference of 1992, environmental cooperation has consolidated itself as a central dimension of contemporary international governance. Multilateral treaties and environmental regimes emerged from the assumption that ecological interdependence required coordinated responses capable of transcending purely national interests. This institutional optimism, particularly reinforced after the Cold War, reflected broader expectations regarding the capacity of liberal multilateralism to provide stable frameworks for international cooperation.

However, the contemporary international order increasingly challenges these assumptions. Geopolitical competition, strategic nationalism, economic protectionism, and institutional fragmentation have weakened the capacity of multilateral institutions to generate consensus and enforce collective commitments (Ikenberry, 2018, 2024; Patrick, 2023). As Oluyemi (2025) observes, such instability reflects deeper transformations in the global distribution of power within an increasingly competitive multipolar system. Environmental governance has been directly affected by disputes involving climate finance, technological asymmetries, biodiversity protection, energy transition, and differentiated responsibilities between developed and developing countries.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed the fragility of international cooperation structures and the limited capacity of global institutions to coordinate collective responses during systemic crises (Zheng, 2026). Rather than strengthening solidarity, the pandemic frequently stimulated unilateralism, border restrictions, and strategic competition among states. In this sense, the contemporary crisis of multilateralism may be understood not merely as a temporary institutional dysfunction, but as a structural manifestation of broader tensions surrounding sovereignty, legitimacy, and global governance itself.

At the same time, environmental degradation increasingly demonstrates the limitations of purely state-centred approaches to international cooperation. Climate change, biodiversity loss, food insecurity, and energy crises transcend political borders and cannot be effectively addressed through isolated national policies. This paradox reveals that, while ecological interdependence reinforces the necessity of cooperation, geopolitical fragmentation simultaneously undermines the institutional conditions required for collective action.

In response to these limitations, global environmental governance has progressively evolved towards more flexible and polycentric arrangements involving subnational governments, corporations, scientific institutions, indigenous peoples, non-governmental organisations, and transnational governance networks (Ostrom, 2010; Hale, 2020). According to Ostrom (2010), polycentric governance systems may increase institutional adaptability, policy experimentation, and local participation through the distribution of authority across multiple decision-making centres. Hale (2020) similarly argues that transnational governance networks increasingly compensate for the limitations of traditional interstate diplomacy.

Nevertheless, this transformation remains contested. While advocates of polycentric governance emphasise flexibility and institutional resilience, critics argue that the multiplication of actors, voluntary commitments, and decentralised arrangements may intensify normative fragmentation, weaken accountability, and

reduce legal coherence within International Environmental Law. Excessive reliance upon soft law and informal governance mechanisms may ultimately privilege political pragmatism over enforceability and regulatory certainty.

The environmental field therefore emerges as one of the principal arenas in which the contradictions of contemporary multilateralism become most visible. Although traditional multilateral institutions face undeniable difficulties, environmental governance simultaneously demonstrates that international cooperation is not disappearing, but rather undergoing a process of functional reconfiguration in which authority, legitimacy, and regulatory capacity are increasingly distributed across multiple actors and governance levels.

5_ENVIRONMENTAL PARADIPLOMACY AND THE RISE OF NEW INTERNATIONAL ACTORS

One of the most significant developments within contemporary International Environmental Law has been the increasing participation of subnational governments and non-state actors in global governance processes.

Environmental paradiplomacy refers to the international action undertaken by subnational entities such as states, provinces, regions, and cities in environmental matters. Since the 1990s, subnational governments have become increasingly active participants in climate governance, biodiversity protection, sustainable urban development, and energy transition policies.

Networks such as the “C40 Cities”, “ICLEI”, “Under2 Coalition”, “Regions4”, “The Climate Group” etc., demonstrate how local and regional authorities have become important governance actors within the international environmental arena.

These actors frequently compensate for the limitations of national governments by implementing ambitious climate policies, fostering regulatory innovation, and participating directly in international negotiations. Cities increasingly operate as experimental laboratories for sustainability governance, developing policies related to urban resilience, renewable energy, mobility, waste management, and climate adaptation (Van der Heijden, 2018).

The Paris Agreement itself reflects this broader transformation by explicitly recognising the relevance of non-party stakeholders, including cities, civil society organisations, indigenous peoples, and private actors.

The rise of environmental paradiplomacy also contributes to the gradual redefinition of sovereignty within International Environmental Law (Litfin, 2000; Rei & Granziera, 2015). Sovereignty can no longer be understood exclusively as unrestricted territorial

authority. Ecological interdependence increasingly subjects sovereign decision-making to international scrutiny, scientific standards, and collective responsibilities.

This process does not eliminate state sovereignty; rather, it functionally redefines sovereignty within a context of global ecological interdependence. States remain central actors within international law, but they increasingly share governance space with multiple institutional and transnational actors.

So, the environmental paradiplomacy may be understood as one of the most significant expressions of the rescaling of global governance in the twenty-first century. As environmental challenges increasingly transcend national borders and directly affect local and regional realities, subnational governments have progressively assumed a more active role within international environmental governance frameworks. Through transnational cooperation networks, climate coalitions, and sustainable development initiatives, regions and cities have demonstrated their capacity to influence global environmental agendas beyond the traditional monopoly of sovereign states. In this context, environmental paradiplomacy strengthens the polycentric character of International Environmental Law, reinforcing the idea that effective environmental governance depends upon coordinated action across multiple territorial and institutional levels.

6_SOFT LAW, FLEXIBILITY AND PRAGMATISM IN INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL LAW

International Environmental Law has progressively developed distinctive regulatory characteristics that differentiate it from more traditional branches of international law (Rei, Granziera, 2015).

One of the most distinctive characteristics of International Environmental Law is the extensive reliance upon soft law instruments (Beyerlin & Marauhn, 2011; Dupuy & Viñuales, 2018). Declarations, guidelines, recommendations, action plans, voluntary arrangements, transparency mechanisms, and political commitments increasingly perform essential functions within contemporary environmental governance frameworks. Soft law therefore performs essential governance functions (Rei & Granziera, 2015). It facilitates consensus-building, encourages policy experimentation, promotes incremental norm development, and enables broader participation by diverse actors.

This preference for flexible instruments reflects the complexity and uncertainty associated with environmental regulation. Scientific knowledge evolves continuously, ecological systems remain highly dynamic, and political consensus is often difficult to achieve. Consequently, rigid and highly coercive legal structures frequently prove politically unfeasible or operationally ineffective.

Furthermore, International Environmental Law increasingly emphasises implementation, monitoring, transparency, and performance evaluation rather than merely formal legal obligation. This functional and pragmatic orientation distinguishes environmental governance from more traditional state-centric legal models (Hunter, 2022).

The Paris Agreement exemplifies this tendency through its reliance upon nationally determined contributions, transparency frameworks, stocktaking mechanisms, and iterative ambition cycles (Falkner, 2016). Rather than imposing uniform obligations, the Agreement establishes governance processes designed to progressively strengthen collective action over time.

Such flexibility should not necessarily be interpreted as institutional weakness. In many circumstances, adaptive and polycentric governance structures may prove more resilient and politically sustainable than rigid treaty obligations incapable of accommodating scientific uncertainty and geopolitical diversity.

7_FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The contemporary crisis of multilateralism, within a context of global disorder (Romero, 2025), constitutes a major challenge for International Environmental Law and global governance. Geopolitical fragmentation, strategic competition, economic nationalism, and declining institutional trust have significantly weakened the capacity of states to construct effective collective responses to global environmental problems. While negotiation processes continue to advance formally, implementation measures frequently remain stalled.

In this context, environmental governance increasingly depends upon processes of institutional adaptation and innovation, many of which are already underway. International Environmental Law itself operates progressively through flexible arrangements centred upon polycentric and multi-level governance structures involving states, subnational governments, international organisations, scientific institutions, civil society, and private actors.

Although there are legitimate concerns that contemporary global disorder may eventually stimulate more profound processes of political fragmentation and institutional rupture, the rise and consolidation of environmental paradiplomacy, together with the expansion of transnational governance networks and the growing relevance of soft law mechanisms, demonstrate that environmental cooperation has not disappeared despite the weakening of traditional multilateral structures (Bulkeley et al., 2014; Hale, 2020). On the contrary, governance authority and legitimacy are being progressively redistributed across multiple institutional levels.

This transformation reflects the necessary recognition that ecological interdependence fundamentally challenges classical conceptions of sovereignty and state autonomy. Environmental problems increasingly transcend territorial borders and require coordinated responses grounded in cooperation, scientific knowledge, and shared responsibility.

In this context, International Environmental Law emerges and consolidates itself as a particularly dynamic and adaptive branch of legal science, oriented towards addressing complex environmental problems and achieving practical results. Its development demonstrates that the future of international cooperation may depend less upon rigid institutional hierarchies and more upon flexible governance networks capable of integrating diverse actors, scales, and forms of authority.

The crisis of multilateralism should not be interpreted solely as a process of institutional decline or global fragmentation. It may also represent a transitional phase in the evolution of global governance, within which new forms of cooperation, legitimacy, and environmental regulation progressively emerge. This may indeed be a moment for revisiting established paradigms; however, the future of international environmental cooperation remains open and far from predetermined.

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