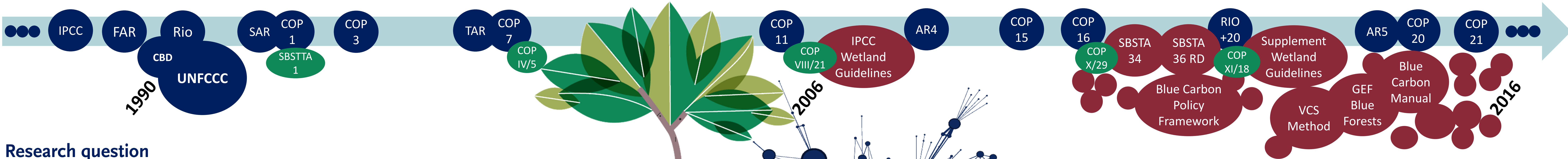# New kid on the mitigation block: coastal carbon

Studying the emergence of coastal carbon governance on the global climate mitigation agenda
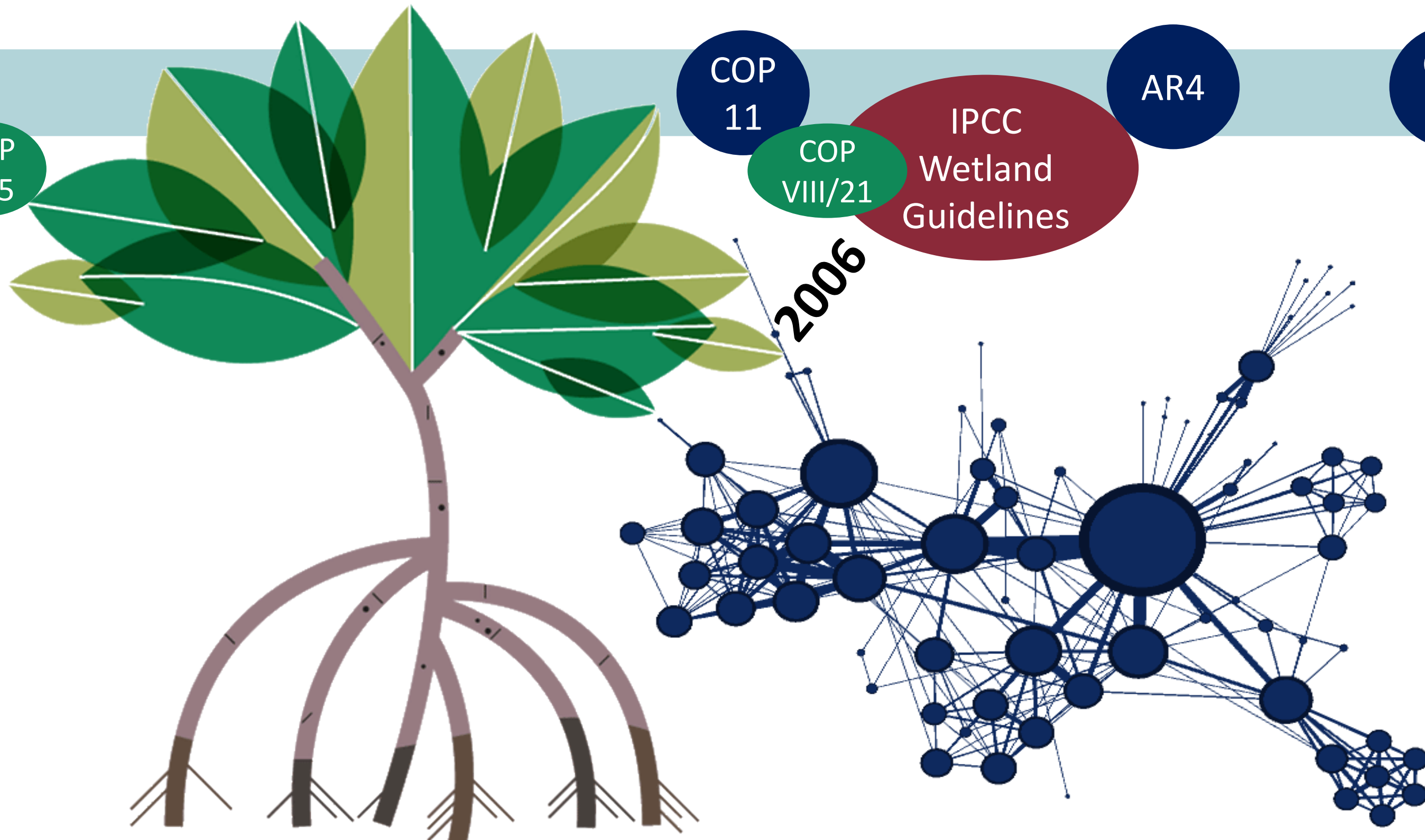

Research question

While negotiations on the sustainable management of carbon sinks started over 20 years ago in the context of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), one issue largely remained absent from the debate: coastal carbon sinks (e.g. mangroves, sea grasses and salt marshes). The biodiversity and climate change adaptation communities have long recognized the numerous services these ecosystems provide; yet they only recently began to be considered for their mitigation potential, that is for their contribution to reducing the concentration of greenhouse gas emissions in the atmosphere. In my dissertation I will examine **how the issue of coastal carbon emerged on the global climate change mitigation agenda**.

Research design

The project is designed as a mixed-methods case study and is set up as a cumulative dissertation consisting of three articles.

The primary data source will be meeting documents issued by the UNFCCC and the Earth Negotiations Bulletin. These will be complemented by Twitter data and documents collected through systematic web searches. The aim is to build a comprehensive database to allow for a longitudinal analysis of the issue's evolution in the international governance context.

The project will reconstruct how the UNFCCC, as the central institution for global climate policy, dealt with coastal ecosystems over time. It will further examine what type of organizations shape the coastal carbon debate and how they relate to the UNFCCC and to each other.

Methodologically the project draws upon content analysis, discourse analysis and social network analysis. The research process will primarily be supported by three software tools: NVivo (qualitative data analysis), UCINET (social network analysis), GEPHI (visualization).

Theoretical framework and core concepts

The project aims to examine the social construction of coastal ecosystems as a climate change mitigation issue. Informed by agenda setting theory and building on the framework of discourse analysis as developed by Maarten Hajer, the project will uncover patterns of discursive agency by identifying policy entrepreneurs and discourse coalitions. For this, it will further make use of concepts from social network analysis (e.g. brokerage positions).

Preliminary results and next steps

- The issue presents a complex actor landscape with various countries, international organizations and non-state actors attempting to shape the governance discourse.
- Contentious issues relate to i.a. the robustness of scientific knowledge on the ecosystems' sink potential, and the financial mechanism to be favored for their management.

- Over the next few months I will finalize my proposal and, upon extension of my contract, start collecting data. Major stepping stones are participating in a Summer School on Theoretically Driven Network Analysis as well as giving a presentation at the 2016 Earth System Governance conference.

Objective

- Better understanding the issue field & the stakeholders' positions to identify hurdles for reaching political agreement at global level

Relevance

"Climate change is the defining challenge of our time"
UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, 2009

- Carbon storage per hectare in coastal ecosystems is > than in tropical forests
- Coastal ecosystems are threatened all around the World
- Their sustainable management has positive effects at global and local levels

Hajer, M.A.(2006.) Doing Discourse Analysis: Coalitions, Practices, Meaning. In: Words Matter in Policy and Planning. Discourse Theory and Method in the Social Sciences, ed. M. Van den Brink and T. Metze. Utrecht: Koninklijk Nederlands Aardrijkskundig Genootschap, 65–74.

Mintrom, M., & Norman, P. (2009). Policy entrepreneurship and policy change. Policy Studies Journal, 37(4), 649-667.

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Map on the distribution of coastal carbon ecosystems: The Blue Carbon Initiative, available at http://thebluecarboninitiative.org/blue-carbon/ Retrieved on 27.05.2016.

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