

Interdisciplinary workshop on sustainability research hosted at the Chair of Comparative Politics

Sustainability research in economics, law and political science was the theme discussed during a two-day workshop organised by Prof. Sandra Eckert at the Chair of Comparative Politics. The aim of the interdisciplinary exchange that comprised six thematic panels was to identify the range of approaches used when analysing important environmental policy issues, and to develop a common basis for interdisciplinary exchange. Throughout the discussion the participants engaged in a fruitful exchange on topical issues such as the assessment of the economic costs and social acceptance of the energy transition, or the role of companies in complying with reporting duties.

The kick-off for the workshop was provided by Prof Eva Lohse (Universität Bayreuth) and Prof Sandra Eckert (FAU) who reflected on comparative research in law and political science. Prof Lohse explained how over time the ecological, economic and social pillars of sustainability have been anchored in international and national law. In her presentation Prof Eckert discussed perspectives of analysis and research designs used in comparative politics studies. She illustrated the difficulties researchers face when collecting data on policy outputs based on a collaborative research project dedicated to the comparative analysis of circular economy regulation on plastics.

A panel on the energy and mobility transition focused on aspects of cost modelling and political implementation. Prof Gregor Zöttl (FAU) presented an alternative model for calculating electricity generation costs in order to facilitate an informed debate on the actual costs of climate-neutral options. In her presentation from an ongoing research project, Dr Aline Bartenstein emphasised the need to include policy proposals by political parties in the modelling of the energy transition and presented initial results of a comparative analysis of party manifestos. Honorary Professor Siegfried Balleis (FAU) used the example of air pollution control at municipal level to report on the challenges of implementing European law; he further emphasised the innovative power that can emanate from municipalities, illustrating his line of argumentation with the innovative use of hydrogen to facilitate sustainable mobility in Erlangen.

How companies and/ or universities research, realise and report on sustainability goals was the topic of a panel with contributions in economics. Prof Marvin Nipper (FAU) presented the methods used and the findings of his research on sustainability reporting that examines the effect on capital market participants. Prof. Devrimi Kaya (FAU) presented the outreach activities of the newly launched Forum N (Forum for Sustainable Business) at the Department of Economics and Social Sciences (WiSo) and invited the workshop participants to engage in this dialogue with local stakeholders. In his role as FAU's sustainability officer, Prof. Matthias Fifka (FAU) addressed the challenges and opportunities when implementing sustainability goals such as energy efficiency and sustainable mobility at university level.

The last panel on Thursday was dedicated to research analysing the use of policy instruments in the implementation of sustainability goals. Based on a quantitative analysis of relevant publication output in top scientific journals, Dr Silvia Weko (FAU) pointed out that in comparison to regulatory measures most research is dedicated to economic policy instruments, with a heavy focus on emissions trading systems and carbon pricing. Prof Mario Liebensteiner (FAU) reflected on the puzzling ignorance of the so-called waterbed effect in the implementation of emissions trading by policy practitioners, which from a theoretic perspective was conducive to suboptimal outcomes. Selim Kücükaya presented the results of a qualitative comparison of

the local political implications and success factors of climate emergency declarations in Jena and Erlangen.

The politics of the societal transformation towards sustainability were at the centre of the first panel on Friday. Based on a representative survey conducted in Germany in November 2022, Dr Constantin Wurthmann (Universität Mannheim) addressed the relevance of negative emotions such as anger or frustration in response to climate change in connection with a subjectively perceived lack of political representation. Dr Simon Primus (FAU) presented the initial results of a comparative representative survey conducted in Germany and Austria ahead of the European elections in May 2024, concluding that varying support for renewable energies is a decisive factor for voting decisions. Kristina Kurze (Universität Göttingen) discussed the results of her qualitative case study on the implementation of the European Green Deal in Hungary and Romania in order to explain why these two Member States have shifted towards fossil fuels.

The final panel of the workshop addressed the implementation of supply chain legislation and the role of litigation. Prof Andrea Lenschow (Universität Osnabrück) reported on two ongoing research projects on supply chain legislation highlighting, amongst other aspects, the divergent approaches adopted in national legislation in Germany and France. In their joint research on supply chain legislation for critical raw materials, Prof Almut Schilling-Vacaflor del Carpio and Dr. Anna Frohn Pedersen (FAU) are investigating how the supply chain legislation in Germany, France and Norway is implemented by companies. Lenschow, Schilling-Vacaflor del Carpio and Pedersen agreed that liability risks are forceful tool to ensure compliance by companies. In his presentation, Eklavya Vasudev (FAU) shed light on the difficulty of establishing causality in climate litigation and developed perspectives on how courts could integrate political science and economic approaches into their reasoning.

In her closing statement, Prof Eckert (FAU) thanked all workshop participants and gave an overview of the key points discussed during the conference. She argued that current developments that should be taken into account in future research on sustainability include increasing regulatory uncertainty caused by legislative change and litigation, the politicisation of environmental issues and an altered geopolitical environment.