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German Political Science Association

Environmental Policy
& Global Change Section

Call for Papers

Knowledge for the Sustainability Transition: The Challenge for Social Science

2002 Berlin Conference on the
Human Dimensions of Global Environmental Change

Berlin, 6-7 December 2002

The Environmental Policy and Global Change Section of the German Political Science Association (DVPW) invites papers for the *2002 Berlin Conference on the Human Dimensions of Global Environmental Change*, to be held in Berlin on 6-7 December 2002. This year's discussions will address the theme "*Knowledge for the Sustainability Transition: The Challenge for Social Science*". The 2002 Berlin Conference has been endorsed by the Institutional Dimensions of Global Environmental Change core project of the International Human Dimensions Programme on Global Environmental Change (IHDP), and is organised by the Global Governance Project of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK) in co-operation with the Environmental Policy Research Unit of the Free University of Berlin. Plenary speakers include Rajendra Pachauri, chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change; Oran Young, chair of the IHDP Institutional Dimensions of Global Environmental Change project; and John Schellnhuber, director of PIK and research director of the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research.

What Do We Know?

The global environmental crisis—from stratospheric ozone depletion to local water pollution—serves to emphasize anew the role of knowledge in political decision-making. Many observers view the existing knowledge base as insufficient for a world-wide transition to sustainability. But how can we do better? Do we need new kinds of knowledge or new

ways to generate knowledge, for instance through a fundamental overhaul of the way we conduct scientific research? How could social and scientific institutions be designed, and possibly reformed, to generate sustainability-relevant knowledge? And what are the effects of the current knowledge base, and the ways it is generated and distributed, on societal decision-making on environmental protection? Within this general framework, we invite papers for the 2002 Berlin Conference on one of three sets of questions:

Knowledge for Sustainability: Three Research Questions

First, we invite papers that conceptualise the knowledge base for the sustainability transition as something *that is affected by political decision-making*. We seek papers, in particular, that analyse ways in which national and international politics and institutions influence the way sustainability knowledge is generated, distributed and used by actors. Papers could address, for example, ways in which political systems influence scientific research for the sustainability transition, including policies that shape the development and safe use of new technologies both harmful and beneficial to the sustainability transition. We also invite papers that examine the distribution and utilisation of knowledge, from scientific information to technical expertise, and that seek to explain the role of political institutions and political and societal actors in these knowledge-generation processes.

Second, and interrelated with the first point, we invite papers that view knowledge as a factor *that affects and influences political decision-making*. It has long been argued that not only power and interests, but also ideas, discourses or belief systems influence the outcome of political decision-making. We thus solicit papers that present cutting-edge research on these questions and that analyse, in particular, the ways in which existing knowledge—from scientific information to more general ideas, discourses or belief systems—affects the ways in which political actors respond to the global environmental crisis. Are there dominant discourses and ideas that prevent us from reaching a more sustainable development? Does ‘science’ and modern technology in itself lead to unsustainable development paths—and how can democratic political institutions manage to live with, for example, the Genie of modern nuclear and molecular technologies?

Third, we invite papers from fellow social scientists that respond to the challenges raised by recent thinkers who have argued for fundamental changes in the way science is conducted—thinkers who have put forward integrative concepts such as ‘earth system analysis’, ‘syndromes of global change’ or ‘sustainability science’. It has been maintained, for example, that a new ‘sustainability science’ must bridge the local-global divide and must include interdisciplinary research that is concerned with multiple scales and multiple actors—how would this affect social science, for example the divide between scholars of international relations and comparative environmental politics? Also, it has been suggested that a sustainability science would require joint efforts of experts and stakeholders from a variety of regions and backgrounds: does the current practice of stakeholder involvement live up to the requirements of sustainability science? In a similar vein, new initiatives strive to better integrate colleagues from developing countries and to build-up independent research capacities in the South—how will this affect the way social science is conducted in the North? Sustainability science, finally, is envisaged as inherently problem-driven in a way that defines academic puzzles from the practitioners’ side, not from the autonomous theory-building research process. How would this affect social science? We welcome innovative and (self-)critical papers on these questions, and hope to stir up debate within the social science community. In addition, we intend to provide some open space during the conference to engage in informal debate among participants on these broader questions.

How to Participate

The 2002 Berlin Conference on the Human Dimensions of Global Environmental Change is the second of its kind in Germany. The last meeting—the 2001 Berlin Conference—gathered 166 participants from 28 countries for a two-day discussion on the role of the nation state in global environmental change. While the Berlin Conferences are organised by the German Political Science Association, we seek dialogue with colleagues from other fields of social science as well as related expertise from natural and integrative sciences, and welcome representatives of these disciplines too.

The conference will be held in English. Prospective paper-givers should send an abstract of their paper of less than 200 words (including name, affiliation and full address of presenters) in the body of an e-mail (no e-mail attachments, please) to the conference office at the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (berlin-conference@pik-potsdam.de). We also invite the submission of full panels of not more than three presenters, in particular panels that represent different geographic, disciplinary or theoretical backgrounds, or different stages in career development. Pre-registration is required.

Deadlines

The deadline for submissions is 31 July 2002. All paper and panel submissions will be reviewed before being accepted for the conference programme. We will send out decisions on acceptance of papers by 14 August 2002. We expect all presenters to e-mail the final version of their paper by 29 November. Full papers submitted earlier will be posted on our web site to initiate early discussion.

Financial Support

We are making all efforts to ensure funding to reimburse the travel costs of paper presenters. For the 2001 Berlin Conference, generous donor support allowed us to reimburse parts of the travel costs of many non-German participants.

Further Information

Further information about the 2002 Berlin Conference will be posted at www.environmental-policy.de. For questions or suggestions, please contact

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- ⇒ Sabine Campe, Manager, 2002 Berlin Conference (sabine.campe@pik-potsdam.de).