

‘Strukturwandel’: what is behind a notion? A qualitative interpretative analysis of the structural change debate in Germany

Short description: In January 2019, the German Commission on Growth, Structural Change and Employment (the so-called ‘Coal Commission’) published its final report on Germany’s coal exit. The Federal Government summoned the Commission “to establish a broad social consensus on the shaping of the energy and climate policy-based structural change in Germany” (Kohlekommission, 2019). Despite the emphasis on achieving a social consensus (referring to the membership of various social, political and economic actors in the Commission), its recommendations are contested. For instance, shortly after the report was published, Ende Gelände! organized a countrywide action week to protest the recommendations of the Commission to close down coal-fired power plants by 2038. My own research in Lower Lusatia indicates that, while the theme of structural change is central in debates over the future of coal mining in the region (see also Morton and Müller, 2018), different actors hold varied understandings of this notion. Hence, rather than taking for granted the notion of structural change as ‘economic restructuring’ (ibid.), a qualitative interpretative analysis could examine, *inter alia*:

- How is structural change constituted as a policy problem in the debate around coal?
- Who is considered able, responsible, and legitimate to steer these processes?
- What role do the different stances on structural change see for coal in the future of the region and its *structural development* (‘Strukturentwicklung’), if any?
- How are the symbolic meanings of coal and mining in the local culture embedded in these imaginaries of structural development?

I will be writing an article based on interviews conducted in Lower Lusatia, Germany, on this topic. In case of synergies, co-authorship in a publication may be possible. However, students are welcome to approach the topic of structural change from other vantage points, as well.

Methods and theories: ideally a discourse analytic approach based on document analysis and if possible, expert interviews.

Timeframe: for theses to be completed by the end of 2019

For how many students this topic is available: one

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References:

Kohlekommission (2019): Abschlussbericht. Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Energie. Kommission „Wachstum, Strukturwandel und Beschäftigung“

Morton, Tom; Müller, Katja (2016): Lusatia and the coal conundrum: The lived experience of the German Energiewende. In Energy Policy 99, pp. 277–287.