

An interpretive qualitative study of the debate around the ‘*Strukturwandel*’ of German coal regions

In the context of efforts to meet the objectives of the Paris Agreement and of EU climate policy, Germany has begun devising plans for the decarbonization of fossil-fuel dependent regions, i.e. regions in which the regional economy is deeply entwined with coal mining. Such decarbonization processes are expected to lead to ‘structural changes’ (ger. *Strukturwandel*), i.e. a restructuring of the regional economy, which is expected to bring about significant changes in the socio-economic and demographic make-up of these regions. 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. The report itself features disagreements on a number of issues, including for example the future uses of coal in the chemical industry.

My research in Lower Lusatia indicates that local actors hold divergent views of what constitutes a *Strukturwandel* for their region, how it should be governed, and what actors ought to play what roles. The *Strukturwandel* can therefore be conceptualized as an *object of governance* in the making (e.g. Bacchi & Goodwin 2016, Duineveld & Van Assche 2011). A master thesis could explore the current debate on the *Strukturwandel* in German coal regions, and shed light on various questions, such as:

- How was the ‘*Strukturwandel*’ constituted as a policy problem in the debate around coal mine expansion plans in German coal regions?
- How have problematizations/storylines around the *Strukturwandel* developed after the Paris Agreement?
- Who is considered able, responsible, and legitimate to steer these processes?
- How is academia involved in governing the *Strukturwandel* of coal regions?
- 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 change?

Students are welcome to choose their empirical focus (national debate, a focus on specific German coal regions) and propose their preferred analytical approach to the topic of *structural change* in German coal regions.

Requirements: Proficiency in German (native speaker level).

Methods and theories: Given the current situation, the thesis must rely on document research. The analytical approach is contingent upon the research question (e.g. interpretive and poststructuralist approaches to policy analysis).

Timeframe: to be completed by the end of 2020

For how many students this topic is available: one

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References:

Bacchi, C., and Goodwin, S., eds., 2016. Poststructural Policy Analysis: A Guide to Practice. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US.

Duineveld, M., and van Assche, K., 2011. The Power of Tulips: Constructing Nature and Heritage in a Contested Landscape. *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning*, 13 (2), 79–98.

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.