

# Knowledge politics for sustainability

**Short description:** Governance for sustainability is confronted with a number of specific problems: Besides marked conflicts of interests and plurality of values the field also has to deal with pronounced '*knowledge challenges*'. 'Facts' on the environment are often only of a provisional nature, and scientific claims loose part of their social robustness as soon as they are put in a decision-context. With that, science has lost much of its legitimation in political processes and policy arenas.

Before that background, research at the chair group of Sustainability Governance has started to focus on expertise in its socio-cultural context. Building on the theoretical concept of 'knowledge regimes', our research starts from the assumption that epistemic arrangements at the interface between science, politics, management and civil society are highly context-dependent and culture-bound. Two research projects will (probably) be kicked off in the next few months.

- In a PhD project, which is embedded into the DFG-funded Graduate School *ConFoBi* ([confobi.uni-freiburg.de](http://confobi.uni-freiburg.de)), research will investigate *professional epistemologies* in the field of biodiversity science and biodiversity policy. The project will reconstruct the different 'thought styles' of selected scientific disciplines, on the one hand, and selected decision-making contexts (in enterprises, administrations, conservation associations etc.), on the other hand, to answer the question under which conditions specific stocks of scientific knowledge are taken up – or maybe even created – in different societal contexts.
- In another PhD project, which is part of a cooperative research project focused on "Communal food systems as a key to integrated sustainability governance" (KERNiG) ([www.envgov.uni-freiburg.de/de/prof-envgov/forschung/kernig-projekt](http://www.envgov.uni-freiburg.de/de/prof-envgov/forschung/kernig-projekt)), research will identify '*knowledge networks*' in the context of local food initiatives and based on that draw conclusions on the feasibility of inter- and transdisciplinary knowledge interventions, specifically in small to medium-sized cities.

Various Master theses could be (more or less directly) linked to the above-mentioned project. We are especially interested in case studies that look at the way how knowledge is created, tested and deployed in:

- various sectors, incl. biodiversity, food, water, climate, forests, agriculture etc. (sectoral regimes);
- various politico-cultural contexts (local/regional/country regimes);
- various social sub-systems, incl. social movements, companies, (city) administrations etc. (organizational regimes).

**Methods:** qualitative-interpretative approaches building e.g. on document analysis, expert interviews, and possibly participatory observations

## References:

Pregernig, Michael (2014); Framings of science-policy interactions and their discursive and institutional effects: examples from conservation and environmental policy. *Biodiversity and Conservation*, 23/14, 3615-3639.  
Jasanoff, Sheila (2005): *Designs on Nature: Science and Democracy in Europe and the United States*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

**Starting date:** at any time

**For how many students this topic is available:** several

**Supervisor:** [Michael Pregernig](#)

**Featured topic: “Science with and for society” – a new research funding principle?**

Scientists in all disciplines need to apply for funding for their research projects. Researchers therefore have to frame their projects and research questions according to the demands, guidelines and priorities of the funding organizations. Funding organizations also make prescriptions about the communication of research results and the integration of non-scientific actors into the research process in order to increase its impact and to guarantee the transfer of relevant ‘facts’ and knowledge to the (imagined) recipients, such as stakeholders and policy-makers. In this context, the scientific principles of transdisciplinarity and interdisciplinarity have gained great currency recently. The European Commission has, for example, formally enshrined these principles in its program “Science with and for society”, which points to the need of producing and circulating knowledge on complex societal problems across various social spheres and scientific disciplines. While there are many general, thematically open scientific funding schemes and organizations operating on regional, national or transnational level, there are also leading initiatives that focus funding on the “grand societal challenges”, such as biodiversity or climate change. These funding policies not only influence which questions will be addressed, but also which actors are included in the research process and whom the produced knowledge outcome is addressed to – in other words, they frame how boundaries between science, policy and society are being defined and negotiated.

Master theses could focus on one of the following (or related) questions:

- How is the role and authority of science framed and negotiated by research funding organizations/networks?
- How are the boundaries between science, policy-makers and society being conceptualized in research calls and by funding organizations?
- How do scientists – in their day-to-day research work – deal with the demands of including non-scientific actors while doing cutting-edge scientific work?
- How are criteria like ‘scientific excellence, policy relevance and societal impact being assessed and evaluated by the funding organizations?

The specific focus of possible Master theses is still quite open: One could analyze how boundaries in research calls, funding regulations and/or evaluation criteria are defined; one could also do a detailed analysis of one or several research organizations/networks or even a specific research project. Students who are interested in doing *comparative* research, might also go for an analysis of similar cases in two or more countries. Currently, our main interest lies on the field of *biodiversity* research, however, we also interested in learning other policy fields.

**Methods:** qualitative-interpretative, building on document analysis, maybe expert interviews

**Starting date:** flexible

**For how many students the topic is available:** 1-2

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