

Call for Papers

Governance for Sustainable Development: Steering in Contexts of Ambivalence, Uncertainty and Distributed Control

Workshop 5th-7th February 2006 in Berlin, "Umspannwerk" (www.palisa.de)

The issue of sustainable development represents a problem of transformation. It requires an active shaping of long-term dynamics in social and technical structures. It thus stirs up debate about political steering and governance. The attempt to plan and regulate macro dynamics of societal development does not, however, have a good historical record. Neither science nor political practice offer adequate concepts to deal with this task. Established heuristics for improving steering capacity come to their limits when applied to sustainable development. They usually expound the need for

- clear, stable and unequivocal *goals* that guide the steering efforts,
- *knowledge* to predict dynamics and the effects of alternative options of intervention, and
- the necessary *power* to implement political strategies.

Science and practice of sustainable development, however, is confronted with fundamental problems in all three dimensions of steering.

- (a) Sustainability, which concerns the balancing of potentially conflicting risk perceptions, values and interests, cannot be defined as an unequivocal and undisputed set of targets. With knowledge development and ongoing cultural and ecological transformation, sustainability goals are subject to change and controversy. Steering for sustainable development has to cope, therefore, with conflict and ambivalence.
- (b) Knowledge of ecological cause-and-effect relations and the coupled dynamics of society, technology and nature is limited and bears fundamental uncertainties. The predictability of long-term developments and possible side-effects of intervention strategies is very limited. For this reason, steering for sustainable development has to cope with uncertainty and unintended consequences.
- (c) The power to shape structural change in society and technology is distributed across a multitude of actors and societal subsystems. While all have particular resources to contribute, they also follow different rationalities and interests. On account of this, steering for sustainable development has to cope with a lack of central control and to face the necessity of coordinating strategies of different actor groups and social networks.

Researchers dealing with these questions from the perspective of different disciplines and problem areas are invited to submit abstracts for papers. Of special interest are papers that

- empirically examine steering situations with respect to the ambivalence of goals, uncertainty of knowledge and distribution of power, aiming to identify typical steering situations that reflect varying combinations of these characteristics.
- review and scrutinize existing steering and governance theories with respect to their implicit assumptions about defined goals, certain knowledge and centralised power,

thus allowing for not only the identification of the roots of theoretical disagreement but also an indication of how a pragmatic combination of theories – by specifying the range of empirical situations to which they apply – could be accomplished.

- conceptualise steering strategies which are able to cope with ambivalence, uncertainty, and distributed power or analyse and assess empirical steering processes which are set up to deal with these challenges.

On the basis of the submitted abstracts, a maximum number of 12 papers will be selected for invitation to the workshop. Authors will then be asked to submit full draft versions of their papers until 15th January 2006 in order to allow for distribution and review by other authors. It is intended to publish a selection of papers in a special edition of a refereed international journal. Please note that we have a (limited) budget for travel expenses. Invited authors may apply for a refund of their travel expenses.

Abstracts of no more than 500 words should be sent to all organisers until 30th October.

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