P80 / Empowered Citizens in Environmental Sustainability: From Civic Practices to Transformative Policy Transitions

Topic : Discourses, Ideas, and Narratives

Chair : Piyapong Boossabong (Chiang Mai University School of Public Policy)

Second Chair : Frank Fischer (Humboldt University in Berlin)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

The search for environmental sustainability constitutes a major challenge of this century. Despite all of the rhetoric about the need to deal with the coming crisis, the actions to mitigate the crisis thus far have fallen far short of those which needed to put humanity on a sustainable course. Why this failure is a complicated topic, politically, economically, and culturally. Here we seek to explore only one aspect of this challenge, namely the role of citizens and the public. While citizens alone cannot solve the sustainability problem, it is at the same time not clear that it can be successfully dealt with without them.

From early on, environmental literature has called for broad citizen participation as a primary requirement for the successful pursuit of sustainable development. It is, moreover, written into key United Nations documents. So far, however, actions to deal with this challenge have not only fallen short of the measures needed to put the Earth on a sustainable course, but also have neglected the role participation. Most of the efforts have largely emphasized scientific and technological solutions, especially those that are driven by market systems. Such attempts to rely on “technical fixes“ have typically occurred at the expense of democratic environmental policymaking and citizen engagement.

An important part of this reluctance to engage citizens is the belief, often more latent than manifest, that the public citizenry is not up to the task. Citizens are seen to lack the requisite intelligence; they are not informed enough to meaningfully deal with the sustainability challenge. Despite this common view, this panel seeks to examine real-world existing policies and practices that demonstrate the ways that empowered citizens can help to put politics on a path to sustainability.

Toward this end, the panel calls for contributions that draw lessons from a range of deliberative participatory projects and governance practices that illustrate the importance of the role that empowered citizens can play in the pursuit of democratically just and sustainable transitions.

CALL FOR PAPERS

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