P296 / Overcoming Problem Conception Biases in Sustainability Policy and Governance: Towards an Integrative Research Program

Topic : Policy Design, Formulation & Instruments

Chair : Benjamin Cashore (National University of Singapore)

Second Chair : Liuyang He (LKY School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore)

Third Chair : Chunhua Ye (National University of Singapore)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

We propose a panel to identify an integrated research program with which to uncover, and overcome, problem conception biases in sustainability policy and governance. The panel seeks to integrate existing and future contributions from scholars who work on problem constructions and policy design. It will draw on Cashore's individual and collaborative research including his manuscript The Environmental Policy Paradox: Why Sustainability Governance is Failing our Planet and What to Do About It {Cashore, Forthcoming #104857}

The problem conceptions component will focus on promising research applying qualitative and quantitative research methods to better document four distinct kinds of problem-solving logics (PSLs) that underpin, and narrow, applied sustainability research: Commons (Type 1); Optimization (Type 2); Compromise (Type 3) and Prioritization (Type 4). We seek to identify those most pressing in-depth case studies and large-N data-sets to identify the processes for change in problem conceptions (Cashore et al. 2024; Visseren-Hamakers et al. 2023; Cashore and Bernstein 2022). We will focus especially on how to apply, and revise, V.2 of the 4 problem types (4PT) code book (Cashore and Liuyang 2026) to academic publications and syllabi, as well as practitioner policy outcomes including policy briefs, formal and informal communiques for action, and mission statements of private and public organizations.

The policy design component will focus on integrating existing and future research (He and Cashore 2026) around how to identify, and anticipate, policy interventions capable of producing durable and effective Type 4 outcomes (Cashore, He, and Ye 2025; Ye, Sun, and Cashore 2026; He, Azziz, and Cashore 2026; Cashore 2026). We especially welcome those efforts that explicitly integrate theories of agency and structure into sparking progressive paradigmatic change, including the role of deliberative policy learning processes (Cashore et al. 2019).

CALL FOR PAPERS

We invite papers that contribute toward an integrated research program with which to uncover, and overcome, problem conception biases in sustainability policy and governance. Papers may address either, or both, of the panel's two components.

Problem conceptions: we welcome research applying qualitative and quantitative methods to document the four distinct kinds of problem-solving logics (PSLs) that underpin, and narrow, applied sustainability research – Commons (Type 1), Optimization (Type 2), Compromise (Type 3) and Prioritization (Type 4). This includes in-depth case studies and large-N data-sets that identify the processes for change in problem conceptions, as well as applications of the 4PT code book to academic publications, syllabi and practitioner outputs such as policy briefs, communiqués and mission statements.

Policy design: we welcome research on how to identify, and anticipate, policy interventions capable of producing durable and effective Type 4 outcomes. We especially welcome those efforts that explicitly integrate theories of agency and structure into sparking progressive paradigmatic change, including the role of deliberative policy learning processes.

Participants must be willing to formally engage insights from each component in their analysis. We anticipate producing an edited volume from selected papers.

Sources

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Cashore, Benjamin. Forthcoming 2027. *The Environmental Policy Paradox: Why Sustainability Governance Is Failing Our Planet, and What to Do About It*. Under contract, MIT Press.

Cashore, Benjamin, and Steven Bernstein. 2022. "Bringing the Environment Back In: Overcoming the Tragedy of the Diffusion of the Commons Metaphor." *Perspectives on Politics*.

Cashore, Benjamin, Steven Bernstein, David Humphreys, Ingrid Visseren-Hamakers, and Katharine Rietig. 2019. "Designing Stakeholder Learning Dialogues for Effective Global Governance." *Policy and Society* 38(1): 118-147.

Cashore, Benjamin, Liuyang He, and Chunhua Ye. 2025. "Advancing Sustainable Trade through Anticipatory Policy Design: Lessons for, and from, Southeast Asia." Hinrich foundation: advancing sustainable global trade.

Cashore, Benjamin, and He Liuyang. 2026. "The 4pt Code Book ".

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He, Liuyang, Abdul Azziz, and Benjamin Cashore. 2026. "Explaining Indonesia’s Solar Deployment Stalemate: Policy Feedback and Anticipatory Policy Design." *To be submitted to Energy Policy*.

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Ye, Chunhua, Yixian Sun, and Benjamin Cashore. 2026. "When Early Success Risks Failure: Applying Anticipatory Policy Design to Accelerate the Ev Transition in Vietnam." *Global Sustainability* .