

European water policy put to the test

International social scientists met at the beginning of January at the UFZ to develop an agenda for future water governance research.

"Rethinking the governance of European Water Protection"; in the first working week of the new year 38 experts met at the UFZ to rethink the policy model for European water protection. In December, the participants, who mainly conduct political science research on water governance, had sent a "two pager" as an admission ticket, so to speak, in which all their collected research findings, their view of the need for research and the most pressing problems were bundled together. In their greetings on 8 January, at the beginning of the event, the Scientific Director of the UFZ, Prof. Georg Teutsch, and the Head of the "Environment and Society" Division, Prof. Bernd Hansjürgens, emphasized the central importance of the European regulatory approach for the social science water research at the UFZ. The scientific conference was organized by Dr. Barbara Schröter from the Leibniz Institute for Agricultural Landscape Research (ZALF), Nadine Schröder from the Leuphana University Lüneburg and UFZ-Post-doc Frank Hüesker from the Department of Environmental Politics. It was based on an idea for a conference panel, initiated by Nadine Schröder, which grew into a small conference in the course of 2018. The Hans Böckler Foundation, in addition to the UFZ, kindly provided the necessary funds.

The central regulatory instrument of European water protection policy over the past 18 years has been the Water Framework Directive of the European Union (EU WFD). This directive, with its holistic, integrative, participatory and nature-based policy approach, has attracted much attention in research. Now, in 2019, according to the idea of the conference, the social sciences should ascertain their state of research in this area in order to be able to have an effective say in the forthcoming evaluation and revision of the EU WFD. Accordingly, the keynote by PD Martin Pusch of the Leibniz Institute for Freshwater Ecology and Inland Fisheries in Berlin under the title "European water-related policies: implementation obstacles and options for a new momentum" elaborated the strengths and weaknesses of the EU WFD implementation. Martin Pusch reported on approaches, such as the River Ecosystem Service Index (RESI) developed with the involvement of the UFZ. All in all, Mr. Pusch anticipated a recurring thesis of the conference: the formally planned revision of the EU WFD this year would always also have to defend the existing as an environmentally progressive amendment cannot be taken for granted considering the current power constellations in Brussels.

In order to elicit current research plans, the water governance researchers from France, Great Britain, Switzerland, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Austria, Australia as well as from various German institutes and universities were given the opportunity to present their current

work in ten minutes. This offer was used intensively, so that 23 presentations in five panels ("Rethinking plurality and implementation obstacles", "Rethinking perceptions and assessment", "Rethinking sector integration, coordination and public participation", "Rethinking water protection objectives and instruments", "Rethinking Research") on two days inspired the researchers to further exchange. This was complemented by the summary of all two papers by Nadine Schröder and Frank Huesker and jointly carving out potential cooperation, such as joint proposals, publications and the connection between social science and natural science research in this field. The panels were followed by discussion and working phases in different group formations. The participants identified research gaps and generated key messages from the collected research results. A total of four already more tangible products have emerged that the participants want to jointly develop and make public in the near future. These and other follow-up activities are planned and are still open for collaboration. Information on this and the possibility to be included in a corresponding e-mail distribution list can be found at the UFZ by Frank Huesker (frank.huesker@ufz.de).

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