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# Shifting gears and forging ahead: Research for transformative climate governance after "Paris"

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## The Current Column

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*Bonn, Berlin 18 May 2016.* May 2016: When heads of state and senior government representatives convened in New York some fortnight ago to ceremonially sign the Paris Agreement, they effectively sealed one of the most important multilateral treaties in recent history. With the ink hardly dried, UN climate negotiators are regrouping in Bonn from 16 to 26 of May, for the first time after the Paris conference, to advance the complex processes of international climate policy. In effect they are now turning to negotiating the implementation of the decisions they have jointly made in Paris. The Bonn Climate Change Conference thus provides a first litmus test for the value of the Paris deal – will it prove as 'historic' as it has been heralded in the wake of the Paris conference or will it turn into another paper tiger of international law?

Only time will tell. Meanwhile, the questions that occupy the minds of researchers in view of the complexity of global climate governance are here to stay, albeit in a shifting political landscape. How can 'climate policies be designed and implemented that prove effective as well as legitimate? What institutions and procedures are required to ensure equity and fairness of climate policies within societies and internationally, for present as well as for future generations? How to improve policy coherence across the many sectors that are relevant to climate policy and sustainable development at large, for instance regarding water, energy, land use or urbanization? Similarly, what helps or hinders an efficient interplay of pertinent policies across global, domestic and local levels of governance? Ultimately, when is climate governance transformative in the sense that it goes beyond merely "greening" business as usual?

Researchers are dedicated to contribute in developing solutions that work: the struggle for gaining support and legitimacy for transformative policies, the coordination of various actors across different domains and levels of policy making, the analysis of narrative frames that would support such transformation. It is therefore of utmost importance to understand the contexts in which climate policies, and the institutions to govern them, are developed. What are competing discourses, what works in different political and legal systems, in economic as well as in cultural contexts? Social scientists play a crucial role in helping to improve researchers' understanding of the challenges that policy-makers face in

implementing the Paris outcomes and to identify suitable entry-points for scientific insights to support climate policies that are efficient and effective as well as legitimate and fair.

It is against this background that the German Development Institute / Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE) and the Environmental Policy Research Centre (FFU) of Freie Universität Berlin have called in a major international research conference on "Transformative Global Climate Governance 'après Paris'". It convenes at the Freie Universität on 23 and 24 May, back-to-back with the ongoing round of climate negotiations in Bonn, and brings together a host of the world's leading thinkers with some 200 social scientists to discuss their research in the light of the Paris outcomes.

The framing of the conference appreciates that climate governance sits at the very centre of wider and primarily normative debates about a global transformation towards sustainability. Void of a „one size fits all“ blueprint for transformative global governance, different options for changing technological pathways and social behaviour, for the management of trade-offs within tenacious political-economic structures, for strategic policy-making and innovation, for organizing participation and deliberation will need to be identified and explored, building on different heuristic traditions and disciplinary perspectives.

In view of this profound challenge with its intrinsic complexities, uncertainties and even contradictions, the research community is well aware that it will not be able to come up with a silver bullet. To be transformative, future climate governance will much rather need to provide an effective and legitimate middle ground for „top-down“ centralized strategic planning with ambitious objectives and long-term vision and a multitude of „bottom up“ initiatives that further progressive incrementalism and innovation in a decentralized manner. Interpreting the details of the climate governance agenda that will emanate from the Paris Agreement and the institutions of the UN climate regime as well as the further development and implementation of ensuing climate policies will require commensurate transformation research. After Paris, it is high time not only for policy-makers, but also for researchers to shift gears and forge ahead!