

Anna Schwachula

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN SCIENCE POLICY-MAKING

The German Federal Ministry of Education
and Research's Policies for International
Cooperation in Sustainability Research

[transcript] science studies

Sustainable development in science policy-making: the German Federal Ministry of Education and research's policies for international cooperation in sustainability research

Schwachula, Anna

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Summary

New knowledge, created in international cooperation, is essential for global sustainability. Set against this background, this study focuses on German science policy for research cooperation with developing countries and emerging economies in sustainability research. Based on interviews with policy makers and researchers, the book scrutinizes the actors, processes and contents of science policy in Germany. The author argues that science policy mainly aims at German economic benefits and technology development. This, however, negatively influences global sustainability. To counter existing path dependencies, the author provides recommendations for sustainability-oriented scientific practice and science policy.

This book deals with the role of science policy for global sustainable development. Cooperation between researchers in the so-called developing as well as the so-called developed world has a great potential to foster sustainable development on a global scale. However, science policies are decisive in setting a supportive frame for research cooperation. Against this background, this book explores German science policy for cooperation with developing countries and emerging economies for sustainable development and seeks to understand why under the surface, sustainability is not the core objective.

At a first glance, sustainable development is increasingly shifting into the focus of German policies. In its Sustainability Strategy, the Federal Government acknowledges the importance of sustainability for its policies in view of its responsibilities on the national as well as on the global level (Bundesregierung 2016). Funds for research cooperation between Germany and developing countries or emerging economies have been continuously growing in the last decade. The German Government has corroborated education and research as a priority area of cooperation with developing countries and emerging economies in consecutive governmental periods (Bundesregierung 2009a; 2013; 2018a).

Conclusions

In this book, I have analyzed German science policy for cooperation with developing countries and emerging economies in the field of sustainability research, its institutional embeddings and production processes through the lens of the Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse (SKAD), complemented with insights from constructivist policy analysis. The combination of both enabled me to conceptualize and explain science policy as a specific type of discourse, including a) the actors involved in perpetuating and renewing the policy discourse, b) the processes of discourse production in a policy setting, c) the contents of the policy discourse, and d) the effects of policy on implemented projects in a meaningful way.

In my analysis, the combination of SKAD and constructivist approaches to policy processes enabled me to shed light on various empirical aspects of policy making and to reflect on theories of policy processes through a perspective of knowledge sociology. SKAD proved as a highly suitable conceptual frame for the analysis of policy. I considered policies as a specific discourse with specific rules for discourse creation, discourse stabilisation and actualisation. The practices of creating new policies – from issuing a new call for proposals, to the funding of research projects and to creating policy programmes and strategies – accordingly were conceptualized as instances of discourse reproduction. Viewing policy as discourse enabled me to expose the interconnections between ideas and structures which contribute to the stability of policy ideas and which prevent discursive change.

In this final chapter, I would like to draw some conclusions in view of the BMBF's science policy for cooperation with developing countries and emerging economies in the field of sustainability research and its relevance for society. I argue that in its current shape, it is not fulfilling its role of fostering a preventative science for global sustainability satisfactorily. Based on my empirical findings, I maintain that first, the direction of science policy in the Sustainability Subdepartment is coined by a high level of discourse stability which makes a continuation of policy more likely than policy change (ch. 11.1). Second, the discursive direction taken does not adequately enable the German research community to engage in a type of science adequate for dealing with global sustainability challenges (ch. 11.2). Third, I suggest a type of science policy that fosters the production of essential transformation knowledge for global sustainable development (Ch. 11.3).

More: <https://www.transcript-verlag.de/978-3-8376-4882-9/sustainable-development-in-science-policy-making/>