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POLITISCHE BILDUNG  
TUTZING

# Making Sustainability Happen: Global Politics Meets Planetary Boundaries

Call for papers

'Thementagung' – co-organised by the DVPW section 'Internationale Beziehungen', the DVPW working group 'Internationale Politische Ökonomie' and the DVPW working group 'Umweltpolitik/Global Change' in cooperation with Akademie für Politische Bildung, Tutzing  
10–12 April 2024

## Rationale and objectives

The world finds itself in a perilous socio-ecological state. Multiple and cascading crises, such as rapidly accelerating climate change, the sixth mass extinction or the COVID-19 pandemic, have prompted calls for political responses that better account for the scientifically demonstrated links between ecosystem integrity and human flourishing. While efforts to address these challenges already face significant pushback and backlash, not least during the unfolding energy crisis, future trajectories look even gloomier as ecological tipping points are approaching dangerously close or have already been breached (at least locally). Average temperatures will further increase, leading to even more extreme and deadlier weather events around the world; biodiversity loss is estimated to exacerbate as global warming intensifies and humans further encroach upon vital ecosystems, in turn undermining food security, public health and societal resilience.

Over the past decade, the 'planetary boundaries' framework has become central to cataloguing these and similar concerns over the excessive use of natural resources and the danger of ecosystem degradation in cases of permanent 'overshoot' of a systemic boundary. Recent debates have underlined the need to reflect more deeply on the conceptual, political and normative implications of planetary boundaries. On the one hand, the concept itself goes back to earlier sustainability discourses that invoked motifs of 'ecological carrying capacity', 'limits to growth' or 'social-ecological resilience' to highlight the boundedness of predominant social and economic patterns of production and consumption. On the other hand, the concept has repeatedly faced criticism for downplaying the social and political underpinnings, as well as the societal consequences, of global unsustainability, including prevalent North-South asymmetries in resource use and exposure to environmental risks. It has so far remained relatively vague what thinking in terms of 'planetary boundaries' entails for global governance. In other words, we lack in-depth empirical evidence on where, how and with what consequences this particular concept is translated into political practice.

The current state of affairs reflects the fragmentation of knowledge production on the concept of 'planetary boundaries' within the broader field of political science. While different subfields have critically engaged with it on their own terms, comprehensive empirical and theoretical consolidation is still pending. Yet there would be considerable benefits of stronger integration, given that the concept speaks to research agendas in several fields of study. Scholars in global



environmental politics and sustainability studies, for example, are interested in how the framing of 'planetary boundaries' makes sense of global environmental change in both geophysical and socio-political terms, enabling certain forms of governance rather than others. For researchers in International Political Economy, global (un)sustainability raises crucial questions about structural constraints imposed by the underlying political-economic system – that is, global capitalism, especially in its currently predominant neoliberal incarnation. International Relations scholars seek to understand how a variety of international institutions (international organisations, regimes and norms) advance or hinder progress in global sustainability governance. A growing number of scholars therefore explore potential transformation pathways away from the globally unsustainable status quo. In each of these fields, the idea of planetary boundaries matters as a key reference point or benchmark for the critical analysis of diverse forms of socio-economic and socio-ecological injustices.

Against this backdrop, the planned 'Thementagung' will bring together researchers from global environmental politics and sustainability studies, International Political Economy, and International Relations to discuss the role of the concept of 'planetary boundaries' in (the study of) global politics. We aim to advance the integration of so far rather dispersed insights in these fields in order to shed light on a range of practices of global environmental and sustainability governance in specific transnational sites and broader political contexts. The event will draw attention to how the governance of planetary boundaries is shaped by and shapes key international norms, the interplay of various state and non-state actors, and the setup of the global political economy at large. The attempted engagement will help to clarify how the concept figures in global environmental governance, inter-state relations, specific domains of the global political economy and certain fields of study themselves. Proposed papers should address some of the following questions about the global and (inter-)disciplinary politics of planetary boundaries:

#### *Emergence of planetary boundaries*

- How did the 'planetary boundaries' concept enter research on global environmental and global sustainability governance? How does the concept communicate with related ones (for instance, 'planetary health')? How has scientific knowledge from different disciplines and localities (in both the Global North and Global South) affected the operationalisation of not only the biophysical but also the economic and social aspects of planetary boundaries?
- What is the role of the concept in both research and politics? How has it reshaped dominant discourses about and practices of global politics and governance? Which actors have promoted it, and with which strategies?
- Which actors challenge the translation and use of the concept? What forms of contestation and resistance have prevailed in both the Global North and the Global South, and why have they been successful?

#### *Impact of planetary boundaries*

- To what extent and in what ways have international institutions taken up the concept? How do international and domestic institutions influence each other in this respect? How does the concept travel across jurisdictions and jurisdictional levels (from the global to the local level and vice versa)?



- How is the concept adopted in specific governance contexts (via translation, downscaling, etc.)? To what extent is political priority given to the governance of specific planetary boundaries (at the expense of other boundaries or different objectives)? How are multiple vulnerabilities and dilemmas taken into account?
- Have new epistemic communities formed in response to its invention and regular data updates? How and with what consequences is the concept mobilised at the science-policy interface?
- When and how do transnational civil society organisations and multinational corporations invoke planetary boundaries to make their case? Which boundaries do they tend to invoke (or de-emphasise) vis-à-vis which audiences?
- To what extent have new norms diffused and consolidated around 'planetary boundaries'? What new governance practices have arisen as a result?

#### *Relations of planetary boundaries*

- How do planetary boundaries relate to features of the global political economy? To which extent is the concept invoked in debates in International Political Economy, as well as the adjacent fields of development studies, economic geography and economic sociology, on global trade, production, development and finance?
- How does the concept of 'planetary boundaries' link to the 'Anthropocene' discourse (and the related 'Capitalocene' and 'Plantationocene' discourses)? How do fields such as science and technology studies (STS) or political theory engage with these ideas when stressing their role as universalised norms?
- To what extent has the concept enabled or hindered inter- and transdisciplinary debates? Is there common ground for discussing global (un)sustainability, especially between communities from the Global North and the Global South?

All proposed papers should clearly speak to the global politics of planetary boundaries. Submissions can approach the relevant inter- or transnational dynamics through various disciplinary, interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary lenses; papers with an empirical or a theoretical-conceptual focus are equally welcome. If you are interested, please submit an abstract of no more than 250 words to [g.mennillo@apb-tutzing.de](mailto:g.mennillo@apb-tutzing.de) by **30 September 2023**. We will inform you by 31 October 2023 whether your paper has been accepted. Kindly note that, given the conference's limited capacity, we impose a strict one-paper-per-person policy. We particularly encourage early-career researchers and scholars from underrepresented groups to apply.

#### **Organisational aspects**

The conference will be organised jointly by the DVPW section 'Internationale Beziehungen', the DVPW working group 'Internationale Politische Ökonomie' and the DVPW working group 'Umweltpolitik/Global Change' in cooperation with Akademie für Politische Bildung, Tutzing. The Akademie will provide for accommodation and catering while we will compensate all active participants (that is, paper givers) for their travel expenses (2nd class return train tickets) with DVPW funds that we have secured for this 'Thementagung'. Organisational questions can be directed to Dr Giulia Mennillo, Lead Scientist for Economic and Social Policy, and Sustainability, Akademie für Politische Bildung, Tutzing, 08158 256 49, [g.mennillo@apb-tutzing.de](mailto:g.mennillo@apb-tutzing.de).



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## Location and schedule

The event will be hosted and co-organised by the Akademie für Politische Bildung in Tutzing. It will take place on 10–12 April 2024, starting on Wednesday afternoon and ending on Friday after lunch. The Akademie can be reached by public transport via Munich central station (S-Bahn/regional express trains) and has a direct bus connection to Tutzing train station. For more information, see: <https://www.apb-tutzing.de/english/contact/how-to-find-us.php>

The Akademie für Politische Bildung, located on Lake Starnberg, is a renowned venue for academic workshops and conferences as well as a forum for dialogue between academics, policymakers and other social actors (trade unions, NGOs, etc.). Being fully funded by the Bavarian Parliament, the Akademie für Politische Bildung is politically and institutionally independent.