

University Alliance for Sustainability
Research and study stays 2015 in the field of sustainability

Report:

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“Explorative Research Visits” - Scholarship from 24 October – 31 October 2015 to St. Petersburg University.

Loss of biodiversity as well as climate change are two of the major global challenges of the twenty-first century; both are horizontal, cross-sectoral policy issues that touch upon a wide-variety of policy sectors and jurisdictions. To tackle these challenges, nation states have established multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) such as the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Designed as administrative bodies of MEAs, the secretariats of international environmental conventions represent the most recent addition to the multilevel architecture of modern public administration. Despite the fact that research has shown that International Public Administrations (IPAs) carry out a manifold range of tasks, including the provision of technical, legal, and procedural expertise to negotiating parties, the promotion of international norms, and the implementation of policies on the ground, surprisingly little is known about their interaction with the stakeholders of these Conventions and other (societal) actors.

Scholars of International Public Administration still lack a thorough understanding of how and under which conditions IPAs shape the process and outputs of multilateral (environmental) negotiations. Based at the Environmental Policy Research Centre of the Freie Universität Berlin (FFU), the project “Behind the Scenes: Mapping the Role of Treaty Secretariats in International Environmental Policy-Making” of the DFG-Research Unit “International Public Administration” aims to fill this void by exploring how and to what extent the administrative bodies of MEAs interact with political and non-political actors of various levels during and in-between major international climate and biodiversity conferences. Theoretically, the project draws on hypotheses and concepts developed in accounts of IPA activity rooted in principal-agent theory, sociological institutionalism, and organizational theory. From a methodological point of view, the project seeks to develop a new approach to measure the interaction between different actors at the international level. Using SNA as our main methodological approach, we go beyond previous research in this area. In order to achieve the highest possible accuracy, we will develop a multi-tiered approach, drawing not only on measures of Social Network Analysis (SNA) but also on analysis of Twitter data.

Studying the secretariats of the CBD and UNFCCC will allow us to define mechanisms that enhance an administrative actor's ability to communicate and interact with policy-makers. The project contributes to a better understanding of the working of IPAs at the intersection of public administration and world politics. Our findings will enable us to assess inter-organizational patterns of horizontal and vertical coordination in the international environmental arena; enabling us to draw a more detailed and comprehensive picture of the complex actor networks in selected areas of global environmental policy-making. That said we believe it to be of great importance to connect to other (scientific) institutes in our field of interest and expertise to allow for the exchange of information; on theoretical considerations, namely (overall) mechanisms of international secretarial influence as well as empirical findings, e.g. topics discussed under the CBD and UNFCCC to shed light on the influence of secretariats.

The "Explorative Research Visits"- Scholarship of the University Alliance for Sustainability to the St. Petersburg State University, Russia, allowed me to explore possible relationships to Russian scientists. Warmly welcomed, we discussed prospects for future exchange between the St. Petersburg University and the Freie University Berlin, not only at scheduled meetings, but also during the conference on "Legal regulation of natural resources: finding a balance private and public interests", held at 28th-30th of October 2015 at the Faculty of Law which I attended. Possible cooperation on the role of selected actors in (trans-)national policy networks and multilateral negotiation as well as the strengths and limits of transformative governance (e.g. social movements, resource management) facilitated exchange which will likely result in joint conferences and summer schools over the next years. Overall, the scholarship of the University Alliance for Sustainability of the Freie University Berlin provided invaluable support to our research project by strengthening the scientific network ties between Russia and Germany on issues related to climate change and biodiversity.