

Program for the Workshop:

Material Grassroots Politics - Doing Citizenship and the Political

Date: 11-12 July 2019

Location: University of Siegen (Germany), Herrengarten 3, Room: AH 216/217

In response to climate change, social inequality and environmental degradation, citizens in various countries have developed new forms of civic engagement. It appears that civic engagement has turned to the local, the material and the cooperative for solutions to these problems. Community supported agriculture, zero-waste-networks, community gardens, repair cafés, upcycling projects, slow food, and cooperatives for green mobility are just a few examples.

These phenomena have been studied as grassroots innovations, real utopias, prefigurative politics or lifestyle politics in everyday life. They have promoted a turn towards material objects, infrastructures, bodily practices, emotions, and tangible space within the research on social-ecological transformation or transition. However, this new emphasis of the materially engaged citizens stands in contrast to the dominant understanding of participation and politics. Instead of putting voting, protest, expertise or dialogue at the center of the political, the new material grassroots politics focuses on the collaborative and creative production of public space and public goods. Particularly its seemingly non-conflictive, pragmatic and apolitical character has spurred both discontent and support.

Beyond these existing diagnoses, the workshop proposes a combination of two existing research perspectives, namely the material turn within studies on social-ecological change and the renewed interest in the concept of the political within political sociology. The concept of the political refers to a specific method of dealing with irreconcilable conflicts about common affairs in a non-violent, agonistic and public manner. It goes beyond standard distinctions of politics, policy, and polity, but stresses the decisive role of direct participation and public conflict about the rules of coexistence.

The idea behind this conjunction of material turn and the political is twofold. On the one hand, bringing the political into the research of the material dimensions of engagement for social-ecological change emphasizes its conflictive and public character. This could shed light on the re-appropriation of public space, the provision of material proof regarding contested issues, and the creative politicization of everyday life. The result might produce a more conflict-oriented understanding of social-ecological change beyond its reduction to a question of social technology. On the other hand, bringing the material turn into the research on the political, engaged citizenship and participation could allow us to elucidate these struggles which used to be dismissed as apolitical due to their high reliance on material, emotional, and spatial practices.

Against this backdrop, questions addressed by the speakers are: Which form of politicization does result from these forms of material grassroots politics? What kind of public and political contestation does emerge when a conventional farmer decides to start a community supported agriculture in the neighborhood? To what extent should material doings be recognized as forms of politically engaged citizenship? How political are the emotions stirred by these forms of material participation? Which politically relevant effects are planned and which should be seen as unintended consequences? What sort of dilemmas such as the oscillation between creative niche and recognized mainstream emerge when citizens start to appropriate public space? What differences exist between the new politics of establishing networks of humans and non-humans in comparison to forms of conventional talk-based politics?

Convenor: Prof. Sigrid Baringhorst, Mundo Yang, Lisa Villioth

Detailed Program

Day One. Thursday July 11

- 14.00-14.20** Arriving and coffee
- 14.20-14.30** Welcome message, introduction
Sigrid Baringhorst, University of Siegen (Germany)
- 14.30-15.30** Project presentation: *Material Grassroots Politics - Examples from Community Supported Agriculture, Community Gardens and Foodsharing*
Mundo Yang, Lisa Villioth, University of Siegen (Germany)
- 15.30-16.30** *Pragmatism and Sustainability: Creativity as a Civic Virtue?*
Bettina Hollstein, University of Erfurt (Germany)
- 16.30-17.00** Coffee break
- 17.00-18.00** *Politicizing Urban Space through Practices of Ecological Citizenship*
Mine Islar, Lund University (Sweden)
- 18.00-19.00** *Struggling to Politicise Climate Change: from Climate Justice Action to Extinction Rebellion*
Anneleen Kenis, Research Foundation - Flanders (FWO) and King's College London (UK)
- 19.30** Joint dinner

Day Two. Friday, July 12:

- 8.45-9.00** Arriving and coffee
- 9.00- 10.00** Keynote: *An Environmental Politics of the Everyday: Material Participation and Populist Resonances*
John Meyer, Humboldt State University (USA)
- 10.00-10.30** Coffee break
- 10.30-11.30** *Transformation as Cultural and Political Conflict*
Bernd Sommer, University of Flensburg (Germany)
- 11.30-12.30** *Practices, Objects and Sites of Repair and Do-it-together Urbanism and its Contribution to an 'Infrastructure of Kindness'*
Michael Jonas, Institute for Advanced Studies (Austria)

12.30-13.30 Lunch and coffee

13.30-14.30 *Self-organization, Sociocracy and Emotions*
Anne Schwab, University of Siegen (Germany)

14.30-15.30 *“None of this is political – All of this is political”*
Eric Swyngedouw, University of Manchester (UK)

15.30-16.00 *Joint Concluding Discussion*