



Universität  
Basel

## Research Project

# Sustainable Development, Governance and Democracy - The Theory and Practice of Transitions Towards Sustainable Democracies

### Project funded by own resources

**Project title** Sustainable Development, Governance and Democracy - The Theory and Practice of Transitions Towards Sustainable Democracies

**Principal Investigator(s)** [Burger, Paul](#) ;

**Co-Investigator(s)** [Bornemann, Basil](#) ;

**Organisation / Research unit**

Departement Gesellschaftswissenschaften / Nachhaltigkeitsforschung (Burger)

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Against the backdrop of persistent problems of unsustainability, there is lively debate both in politics and in science on how to govern societies towards more sustainable pathways. In conceptual terms this debate increasingly builds on the notion of 'governance' which highlights both theoretical limits to classical models of political steering and the empirical insight that governments are not the only relevant actors when it comes to the management of societal issues. Instead, at least within the context of modern democracies, the contested, interdependent and dynamic nature of contemporary policymaking has given rise to less hierarchical but more collaborative and polycentric forms of governance. Accordingly, for theoretical and empirical reasons, the governance of modern societies is more and more understood as a shared responsibility of the state, the market and the civil society.

This 'new governance complexity' is assumed to entail potentials and threats for sustainable development and democracy throwing up some fundamental questions regarding the relationship between all three concepts: How can societies be governed towards sustainable development in a democratic way? What are the normative and functional requirements of sustainability governance in democratic societies? And what are the empirical conditions as well as prospects and barriers of democratic forms of governance for sustainable development within various political contexts?

The project addresses the relationship between governance, sustainable development and democracy in theoretical and empirical respects. First, it will lay a theoretical fundament by elaborating on the concepts of governance, sustainable development and democracy as well as their relationships. Secondly, specific approaches of governance for sustainable development will be critically discussed particularly with regard to their democratic implications. Thirdly, a number of case studies of sustainability governance in different fields such as energy, agriculture and transport (or others) will produce evidence on the democratic problem-solving capacity of different governance arrangements in various contexts. Finally, further theoretical and practical perspectives of democratic governance for sustainable development are sketched out.

**Keywords** governance for sustainable development, democracy, sustainability transition

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**Add publication**

**Add documents**

**Specify cooperation partners**