

Tensions between Sustainability Transformations and Democracy: Learning from European Farmers' Protests

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Project description

Tensions between sustainability transformations and democracy are becoming apparent in many areas of society in recent years. A striking example is the farmers protests that have arisen in multiple European countries recently, not only in The Netherlands but also in France, Germany, Belgium, and Poland. This demonstrates the potential for discontent over sustainability policies and actions, not only among farmers but also rural communities and wider society. Most broadly, it highlights tensions between sustainability transformations and democracy. How can sustainability transformations be pursued and navigated given the potential for contestation and pushback? How can such transformations be inclusive and allow for different voices and values, even if this seems to be at odds with the goals of transformation? To what extent and through what means can different views be reconciled (including through democratic/governance innovation), especially given material needs, cultural resentment, and rural-urban divides? These are the types of exciting and urgent questions that we want to tackle in this project!

The project will study and compare farmer's protests in various European countries to understand how and why discontent over sustainability transformation arises and what could be done to address it. It will do this by drawing together multiple sources of (primarily qualitative) data to explain how policy struggles have erupted and evolved and use this as a basis for thinking forward about governance approaches and interventions that could address these problems. We have ideas in mind about possible approaches (e.g., discourse and policy narratives) and theories (e.g., democratic legitimacy, policy conflict) but are also open to co-constructing the approach with the BMA recipient! Our core objective is to find ways to learn from challenging real-world experiences in contemporary sustainability politics to push forward thinking about acceptable and effective ways to navigate towards sustainability. We also aim to write a collaborative paper with the BMA recipient to publish the results in a leading sustainability journal.

Job requirements

This project requires a person who is interested in issues of sustainability transformations, contested governance, and social science methods, and has an interest in understanding and linking different perspectives. Moreover, you should be self-motivated, have a constructive style and attention to detail, be capable of working independently and also collaboratively, and be enthusiastic to learn about new approaches and concepts. Language skills in relevant countries is a plus. You will also have the opportunity to interact with, and learn from, a wider research team studying contested climate change policymaking.