

Eawag Seminar Invitation

Actors and Agency in Sustainability Transitions: A study of Swiss waste management

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When **Friday, 24 November 2017, 13.30 – 14.30**

Where **Forum Chriesbach D24, Eawag Dübendorf**

Abstract One of the core issues dealt within the sustainability transitions research is how to promote, influence and govern the transitions of socio-technical systems such as energy supply, water management, and waste management to more sustainable trajectories. Although the governance of sustainability transitions has gained growing scholarly attention, the analysis of actors, their agency and politics have remained underaddressed. Yet, understanding the political context and how it is shaped by the interaction of actors and institutions are imperative to develop strategies for effective governance. Studying policy processes can be instrumental in that sense as they not only provides insight into actors' policy beliefs, preferences and emerging coalitions but also shed light onto the prospects and likely trajectories of transitions.

The presentation features three studies completed within the PhD project investigating the transitions in Swiss waste management as part of the National Research Programme "Energy Turnaround" (NRP 70). The first study identifies the policy beliefs of key actors and the resulting discourse coalitions in Swiss waste management by using advocacy coalition framework as theoretical basis and discourse network analysis as the analytical tool. The second study presents a heuristic to analyse agency in transitions. Even though there have been recent contributions in the literature dealing with power relations in transitions, they tend to focus on different forms of power and how it is exercised. Similarly, previous works about agency gave emphasis on how agency manifests itself in practices or actions such as institutional work. However, the question of how agency is constituted and what makes some actors more powerful than others is left unanswered. The heuristic strives to address these research gaps and conceptualizes agency as a configurational entity with resources, social networks and discourse being the key constituent elements. The third study applies the heuristic to the empirical case of Swiss waste management to uncover the foundations of strong agency. The three studies altogether provide a fine-grained view on the political context and the likely barriers and drivers that governance efforts have to address.