

Spring Campus, March 27 -31, 2017

Workshop: "Feasible or Illusion: Economic Globalization and Decarbonization?" March 28-29, 2017

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The production and consumption of goods and services goes hand in hand with the production of carbon dioxide. In the last couple of years, the carbon content of production and consumption on a per unit base has – in some cases - decreased. The gains in efficiency due to process and product innovations are significant. But the Earth Overshoot day last year was on August 8, 2016. From this day on we began to use more ecological resources and services than nature can regenerate. As a matter of fact, the earth overshoot day happens slightly earlier every year and given the current trend it seems, that the global carbon budget, which leave us under the 2 degrees celsius level agreed in Paris 2016, will be much earlier used up than previous prognoses calculated.

A reason for the decoupling of energy efficiency and emission levels might be the so called rebound effect, i.e. savings of resources through efficiency are linked to higher consumer spending, that eventually results in an increased overall resource consumption. A further main driver for the bifurcation of energy productivity and carbon emissions can be seen in the processes of economic globalization, in particular in the cross-border trade of goods and services. For the most time after WWII, growth rates of global exports and imports of goods and services far exceeded growth rates of national GDPs. About 25% of global CO₂ emissions stem from the production of goods that are not invested or consumed within the nation-state borders of the production loci. Export-oriented economies, for example, not only have positive trade balances but also export carbon emissions in net terms. Investment and consumption patterns of net importing economies are prone to receive with imported goods and services also 'bad' goods in form of carbon emissions. This can create a situation where national efforts of decarbonization may reduce domestic carbon emissions, whereas net good imports lead to an increase in carbon emissions. In other words, cross-border trade with private goods can contradict national climate policies because the source of emitting has been externalized. Does this mean that climate policies and economic globalization are contradictions? Do we need a carbon emission-guided policy of deglobalization? What can concepts like degrowth, which is arguing that a decoupling of consumption and environmental usage is not possible, or selective growth contribute to understand and overcome this contradiction? In its sense, do we need a conversion of currently growth dependent structures and institutions? Or, very radically, do we need a total rejection of economic growth and instead should strive for a social-ecological transformation? What kind of political strategies do nation-states, international organization or the G20 develop to make open economies compatible with decarbonization? What about a policy of sufficiency as a replenishment for efficiency?

We invite doctoral students to present work that addresses this topical area.