

Spring Campus, March 27 -31, 2017

Workshop: “Governing by Numbers - The Role of Indicators, Data and Empirical Evidence in the Political Transformation to Sustainability”, March 28-29, 2017

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Abstract:

In September 2015, the United Nations ratified the Declaration „Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. “ Main element of the Declaration are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and their respective indicators. The Declaration is yet another proof of the fact that statistical indicators have come to play a major role in modern politics in general and in the transition to sustainable development in particular.

Yet another example would be the recent national initiatives of many OECD countries to calibrate alternative indicators of welfare in order to cater for a higher quality of life or even happiness. There are many reasons why the role of indicators has become so prominent: the belief that “what we measure affects what we do” (Stiglitz), the fact that we are living in an information age, the desire to make public administration measurably accountable, the advances in the methodology of measuring well-being, ensuring citizen participation and so forth. But the most important reason is the fact that political priorities have in the past been already linked to a specific and tremendously powerful indicator: GDP und its rate of change, growth. The quest for sustainable development is thus not only the attempt to counterweight GDP and to change policies accordingly, but to fight fire with fire – to use indicators to induce change.

This one-day workshop will discuss the role of indicators in politics and the politics of change and sustainable development. Various country examples will be presented (with a specific weight placed on the processes of indicator selection, the resulting and surrounding political debates and conflicts especially regarding the importance of growth – next to methodological questions of indicators themselves) and as well as general research on the role played by indicators in politics. As research on the role played by indicators is a growing field but one underrepresented in political science, the desired workshop outcome is not only to connect ongoing international individual research, but to explore and highlight the manifold methodological and disciplinary possibilities that enable coming to grips with the role played by indicators in politics.