

PoNa – Shaping Nature: Policy, Politics and Polity

Rural development and agro-biotechnology between criticism and vision

Initial situation

The research project “PoNa – Shaping Nature: Policy, Politics and Polity” analyses the mutual relationships between nature and politics, focusing on the question of how nature and the manifold relationships between nature and society are shaped by politics. Of particular interest is the question of how economic rationalities and mechanisms influence the shaping of societal relations to nature.

PoNa criticises that the contradictions and conflicting aims that arise in shaping societal relations to nature are rarely the subject of political negotiation. Instead, even in political programmes that are explicitly committed to sustainability, various positions, assumptions and rationalities exist side by side unconnectedly. In this manner, socio-ecological crises not only remain unsolved but are in some cases even exacerbated.

The PoNa research project assumes that a systematic discussion of the various existing and underlying views of nature and politics is necessary in order to understand socio-ecological crises and develop transformation knowledge to sustainably shape societal relations to nature.

Project goals

PoNa aims to create awareness of the fact that nature is a co-product of socio-economic developments. In order to comprehend the connections between nature shaping and politics, the project examines the question of who is in a position to shape what nature. The objective is to identify democratic spaces for negotiation in which these issues are – or can be – discussed.

In addition to making a scientific contribution to social ecology, PoNa also aims to derive recommendations for (political) practice and describe contents, structures and processes that are suitable for sustainably shaping societal relations to nature.

This examination is conducted using as examples the two policy areas of rural development and biotechnology in agriculture in Germany and Poland.

Rural development policy area

Rural areas are subject to various socio-economic transformation processes. Of the different policies affecting rural development, EU agricultural policy is especially important to the development of rural areas. In the current funding period (2007 to 2013), the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) is pursuing the aim of increasing the competitiveness of rural areas and at the same time implementing their sustainable development. This describes an area of conflict that gives rise to questions relating both to the underlying understanding of sustainability and to the possibilities and limitations of

integrating differing priorities.

Biotechnology in agriculture policy area

The use and establishment of biotechnology in agriculture is extremely controversial. The issue goes beyond the question of growing or not growing genetically modified plants: it poses fundamental, divisive questions as to which agriculture, which nature, which food, feed and energy production a society wants to shape with which technology. With the development and introduction of the coexistence concept, which assumes that biotechnology-free and biotechnology-based agriculture can principally be conducted side by side, a shifting of these conflicts into the various rural areas of the individual states is becoming apparent. Neither there nor at other levels in the political system however do suitable spaces for negotiation currently exist.

Project coordination

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