

The generational goal – changes of consumption patterns and their environmental impacts

Purpose and perspectives

The purpose of this research programme is to study the generational goal, which is a political goal, adopted by the Swedish parliament in June 2010 and supported by several parliamentary parties.

According to the generational goal, “the overall goal of Swedish environmental policy is to hand over to the next generation a society in which the major environmental problems in Sweden have been solved, without increasing environmental and health problems outside Sweden’s borders”. Environmental policy, therefore, should aim at ensuring that “patterns of consumption of goods and services cause the least possible problems for the environment and human health”.

As the length of a generation is normally considered to be 25 years, this is a very ambitious goal. With the proposed research programme we aim to investigate how the goal can be interpreted and translated into action pathways.

The research team will study historical and current changes of consumption patterns and their global environmental effects. This will provide an opportunity to deal with some of the vital questions for humankind. We will primarily address basic research questions, rather than applied ones. The programme will in this respect be different from many research collaborations in the environmental field today that are initiated by funding bodies.

Nevertheless we expect the research programme to result in new knowledge that would serve as an input to Swedish climate politics. Even though consumption patterns and their global impacts are being studied in several disciplines, the broad and collaborative approach on changes in consumption patterns and their global effects is a unique feature of this programme. In addition to generating knowledge relevant for policy making, the research team aims to reach out to the public through media and debate book(s). To facilitate this we have invited one scholar with broad contacts and experience from public media (Magnus Jiborn).

The research programme has three common perspectives:

1. Macro- and micro-perspective, and the interface between the two.
2. Historical-contemporary-future studies
3. Descriptive, normative and prescriptive analyses

The main focus of the research programme is on climate change, one of the main environmental problems that are facing humanity today.

The research programme is of highly interdisciplinary nature. It aims to provide a platform for new exciting interaction between researchers from five different faculties and eight disciplines that have never worked together before. This innovative and daring constellation of researchers may lead to creation of new knowledge and to identification of yet unexplored questions and research problems at the cross-roads of different disciplines, thereby setting the scene for future research that addresses critical societal problems.

The research team has been deliberately designed to incorporate researchers with partly conflicting positions and perspectives. Most research collaborations today aim at finding consensus; in contrast, this research programme aims to challenge uni-disciplinary established positions that historically prevailed in the research landscape and

to provide a platform, space and forum for powerful multi-, inter- and cross-disciplinary dialogues, which will highlight existing discursive divergences among research disciplines. This will be instrumental for improving the understanding and respect for their different assertions and potential insights regarding problematisation and action pathways for “the generation goal”.

The research team intends to convey these processes and their outcomes both to the Swedish research community and to the general public, thereby contributing to the societal debate. The researchers in the team differ profoundly when it comes to political views – from market liberal to Marxist thinking – as well as views on issues such as development, where some claim that it is a zero-sum game whereas others believe that actual development takes place. There is neither any agreement on the pros and cons of international trade within the group, nor on the existence of environmental debts and how these should be assessed.

Research questions

The research programme will address five research questions (RQs):

1. What does individual responsibility mean in a large and complex system?

Within this RQ we will deal with incentive instruments over time and space given insecurities of the systemic consequences of individual choices. Incentive instruments are understood in their broadest sense as consisting of information, laws and financial instruments. In the public discourse over climate change, a common theme is how each of us, individually, can contribute to reducing climate affecting emissions by changing our consumption. However, the effects of individual choices that take place within a complex economic system are often quite difficult to predict and assess. Changes in consumption patterns also affect prices, and thereby the decisions of other consumers and investors. At the same time, political measures – such as a cap-and-trade system – may sometimes seem to crowd out the effects of individual choices. How does this affect our views about individual responsibility?

2. What are the relations between consumption and environmental impacts and what historical and modern strategies are available for addressing them?

In order to answer this RQ we will critically scrutinise methods that are currently employed for identifying environmental impacts from consumption (where the global impacts from international trade are included) and develop alternative measurements. We will also carry out research on historical and modern strategies for addressing environmental impacts at different levels. In addition, we will study the political implications of particular kinds of consumer perspectives, for instance regarding trade politics and development politics. We will draw parallels to the 18th century mercantilism where the state defined what “good” consumption was.

3. Is it relevant to talk about environmental debt?

Justice across time and space - inter-generational justice - is a cornerstone of this RQ. One complication is that large societal decisions affect not only the life conditions of those that come after us, but also who will come after us. Another issue concerns justice between rich and poor countries. Some people think that rich countries should pay more to combat climate change, while others think that everyone should take equal responsibility for both mitigation and adaptation. Given both positive and negative externalities from past economic development, it is not obvious how to regard the existence of an environmental debt, or how it should be estimated. We will also address the question whether framing the issue as one of environmental debt is likely to increase or decrease individual involvement and engagement in advancing environmental goals.

4. What governs consumption patterns?

In RQ4 we will deal with what governs consumption patterns. We will investigate the importance of the state as well as the impact of globalisation on consumption patterns. Consumption patterns are defined to include not only the composition of consumption, but also absolute levels of consumption. We will also focus on the inter-linkages of technological change, increased work efforts and increases in income for determining consumption patterns historically, presently and in models of the future.

5. How realistic is the generational goal?

The research questions 1-4 will collect evidence that will contribute to answering RQ 5, which will assess the realism of the generational goal in Sweden. We will investigate how politicians who took the decision make sense of the roles and responsibilities of different societal actors in reaching the generational goal, and what kinds of discursive struggles can be discerned between politicians, civil servants and researchers. We will also investigate the practical implications of the generational goal, including its feasibility and implementation costs.

Methods

As the research team comprises researchers representing eight different disciplines and five faculties it is clear that the array of methods to be employed in the programme will be quite encompassing. We will use statistics, input-output methods, life-cycle analyses, interviews, surveys, archival studies and economic experiments to name just some of the methods.

Strategies and activities

The research programme was initiated by Astrid Kander and she will be the main leader of it. She will have strong support in the management from Oksana Mont and Magnus Jiborn.

Besides researchers, the research team comprises one expert in media interaction since the goal of the research programme is to reach out to general public, well beyond the scientific community. This will also benefit the Pufendorf Institute.

In order to facilitate cooperation and exchange of ideas, the research group will coordinate its activities so that as many as possible in the group will be present and work at the institute during two days a week, preferably Thursdays and Fridays. These days are chosen so as to collide as little as possible with seminar series run in the home departments of the researchers and to facilitate the participation of researchers from Stockholm and Umeå.

The theme will run between September 15th 2012 and May 15th 2013. The work on each RQ will start with a half day-workshop for the participating researchers. The aim of these workshops is to decide on concrete ways of working, and to choose a group coordinator, to ensure that the goals of each RQ are reached. There will also be a start up workshop and regular meetings that include all researchers in the programme, in order to ensure cross fertilization of ideas between the RQs.

There will also be a series of seminars, open to other scholars at the university to facilitate production and dissemination of knowledge, and with participation from invited renowned international scholars in the field.

The Generational Goal

Project leader

Astrid Kander
Department of Economic History, Lund University
+46 46 222 74 83
<http://www.ekh.lu.se/ekhaka/>

Researchers

Annika Carlsson Kanyama
FOI, Swedish Defence Research Agency and Environmental and IMES, Lund University annika.carlsson-kanyama@foi.se

Kirsten Gram-Hanssen
Danish Building Research Institute, Denmark
Guest researcher, Pufendorf IAS
kgh@sbi.aau.dk

Magnus Jiborn
Department of Philosophy, Lund University
+46 72 313 22 70
magnus@jiborn.se

Mikael Klintman
Department of Sociology
+46 702 845 548
mikael.klintman@soc.lu.se
<http://www3.soc.lu.se/index.php?id=315>

Åsa Knaggård
Department of Political Science
+46 46 222 01 64, +46 46 222 62 06
asa.knaggard@svet.lu.se
<http://www.svet.lu.se/?AKN>

Magnus Lindmark
Department of Economic History, University of Umeå
+46 90 786 79 35
magnus.lindmark@ekhist.umu.se

Leos Müller
Department of History, Stockholm University
+46 8 674 71 02
leos.muller@historia.su.se

Oksana Mont
International Institute for Industrial Environmental Economics, Lund University
+46 46 222 0250
oksana.mont@iiece.lu.se
<http://oksanamont.blogspot.com/>

Håkan Pihl
Department of Business Administration
+46 70 250 64 56
Hakan.Pihl@fek.lu.se

Erik Wengström
Department of Economics
+46 46 222 01 23
erik.wengstrom@nek.lu.se
<http://www.nek.lu.se/nekewe>

Program and activities

Welcome to the Pufendorf's Autumn 2012 series on Consumption, Environment, and the Generation Goal

The Politics of the Generational Goals

Friday, October 5, 14:15 - 15 at the Pufendorf Institute, Biskopsgatan 3

Seminar leader: **Åsa Knaggård**, Political Science

The theme of this seminar is the Swedish generational goals for the environment. Many of the goals are very hard to obtain, or obtainable. The goal for climate change is, for example, based on international cooperation, rather than national action. How can we then understand the generational goals? Are they meant to be instrumental or should we rather understand them as symbols for a general political direction with only weak connections to actual political actions? What role can the generational goals play today? The problematic will be exemplified by the climate goal.

Å. Knaggård is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of Political Science at Lund University. Her research interest concerns the role of ideas in the stability and change of political institutions and practices, especially concerning environmental problems.

An overview of the Sustainable Consumption and Production Field

Friday, October 12, 14:15 – 15:45 at the Pufendorf Institute, Sölvegatan 2

Seminar leader: **Oksana Mont**, Sustainable Consumption and Production

The seminar will provide an overview of Sustainable Consumption and Production field in the last 20 years starting with preventive environmental strategies for improving efficiency of production processes, moving on to existing strategies for reducing impacts of products and services and then proceeding to outlining policy strategies and practices for sustainable consumption and discussing existing myths about consumer behavior that thwart sustainability.

O. Mont is a Professor in sustainable consumption and production at the International Institute of Industrial

Environmental Economics at Lund University. She leads research on sustainable consumption and lifestyles; on sustainable business models and social innovation.

What if everyone did that? And what if they don't?

Friday, October 19, 14:15 – 15 at the Pufendorf Institute, Sölvegatan 2

Seminar leader: **Magnus Jiborn**, Philosophy

Norms influence individual consumer behaviour as well as our assessments of different political proposals in the area of climate change. But what kind of norms should we endorse? One common approach is to propose norms that would yield good results if everyone, or nearly everyone, followed them. This approach is implicit in various attempts to define climate justice, such as the Greenhouse Development Rights Framework. But an action that would have good consequences if others acted in a certain way may well have less good, or even bad, consequences if they don't. This seminar discusses the structure of moral decision problems and possible implications for the discussion on how to realize environmental goals.

Intergenerational Behavior and Climate Change Policy

Friday, October 26, please observe the new time: 10:15 – 12:00 at the Pufendorf Institute, Biskopsgatan 3

Seminar leader: **Erik Wengström**, Economics

In this seminar, I will present economic research on intergenerational fairness issues. More specifically, I will present an ongoing project that addresses the question of how future generations are likely to respond to the behavior of earlier generations. For example, do increased climate-change actions of an earlier generation spur increased actions of future generations? The project will also study how such reciprocal behavior is affected by uncertainty about future environmental costs as well as inter- and intra-generational income inequalities. Finally, our project will analyze implications of our economic experiments on climate economic models and climate change policy.

E. Wengström is Associate Senior Lecturer in Economics at the Lund University School of Economics and Management. His research is directed towards understanding preferences and behavior of individuals and organizations.

Consumption and Human Evolution: Preconditions for Changes of Social Norms

Friday, November 9, 10:15 – 12:00 at the Pufendorf Institute, Sölvegatan 2

Seminar leader: **Mikael Klinton**, Sociology

In this seminar, I present the main ideas of my book that will have been published one week prior to the seminar. The book's title is *Citizen-Consumers and Evolution: Reducing Environmental Harm through Our Social Motivation*. From evolutionary as well as sociological perspectives, the book indicates how social motivation (rather than economic or ecological motivation) constitutes a core driving force for humans. Recognizing the importance of social motivation is essential as a basis for the advancement of sustainable development and adaptation of the norms and practices of citizen-consumers, markets and politics. From this argument, illustrated

by empirical examples, I suggest some ways ahead for in connection to our Pufendorf group as well as to the Generation goal more broadly.

M. Klintman is Professor of Sociology at the sociology department, Lund University. He specializes in social, political and evolutionary preconditions for citizen-consumers to reduce society's environmental harm, directly in everyday life and through sub-politics and though support for a greener politics.

A better way to assign responsibility for carbon emissions

Friday, November 16, 10:15 – 12:00 at the Pufendorf Institute, Biskopsgatan 3

Seminar leader: **Astrid Kander**, Professor of Economic History at Lund University

This seminar will highlight one drawback of the currently very popular consumption based emission estimates for assessing the impact of international trade on carbon dioxide emissions in individual countries. The MRIO (multi regional input-output) method and the SRIO (single regional input-output) method with actual technologies are similar in that they aim at allocating all global CO₂ emissions to the country of consumption of the commodities rather than to the producer country. However, both methods have one severe drawback when they are used for assessing responsibility for global emissions; i.e., they neglect the NEGA-emissions, which are the saved emissions in developing countries due to importing goods produced using cleaner technologies in developed countries.

If the amount of CO₂ emissions of a country's consumption, adjusted for international trade, is the key question, then the appropriate method should be the MRIO method (or the SRIO with actual technologies), adjusted for the NEGA-emissions possibly incurred. It is suggested that this revised method could also result in all countries' emissions summing up to actual global emissions. This new way of measuring responsibility would increase the legitimacy of the calculations as a measure of responsibility for emissions because both the consumption levels and patterns and the production technologies and energy systems of all nations would be taken into account.

Institutional Entrepreneurs, Institutional Change and Reflections on Environmental Economics

Friday, November 23, 10:15 – 12:00 at the Pufendorf Institute, Biskopsgatan 3

Seminar leader: **Håkan Pihl**, Business Administration

In this seminar I present a book chapter published last year that analyze the emergence of a network organization created to co-manage environmental resources in the wetlands of Kristianstad, Sweden. The case was analyzed by the use of a theoretical framework developed by Douglass North, emphasizing the role of institutional entrepreneurs and learning. I use the case to reflect on Environmental Economics and discuss the need for theory that observes several layers of asymmetries in institutions for allocating environmental resources.

H. Pihl is Assistant Professor in Business Administration. His research interest is institutional economics and coordination mechanisms, especially applied to areas such as environmental problems and the strategies and organizations of MNEs.

Climate Denial and Its Significance: Examples from a Few Countries, Including Sweden

Friday, November 30, 10:15 – 12:00 at the Pufendorf Institute, Biskopsgatan 3

Seminar leader: **Annika Carlsson Kanyama**, FOI/IMES

Studies of climate change denial (arguments, occurrence, distribution, significance) have been conducted in countries such USA, UK, Norway and Sweden in recent years. After being banished from "fine media" climate deniers have found channels such as webpages for commenting and blogs. The public has in many countries been increasingly influenced by denial arguments, which probably affects public opinions about both mitigation and adaptation. In my talk. I bring up literature in the field and address some issues that may be of interest for further research.

Annika Carlsson Kanyama is Research Director for climate and energy issues at FOI, and adjunct professor at LTH. She has done research on both consumption and greenhouse gas emissions as well as on adaptation issues at the municipal level.

Title TBA

Friday, December 7, 10:15 – 12:00 at the Pufendorf Institute, Biskopsgatan 3

Seminar leader: **Magnus Lindmark**, Economic History

Summing up Our Lessons So Far: Ways ahead

Friday, January 11, 10:15 at the Pufendorf Institute, Biskopsgatan 3

Seminar leaders: **Astrid Kander, Oksana Mont & Magnus Jiborn**