University of BRISTOL

Cabot Institute

One-Day Roundtable Symposium

Risk, regulation and justice: environmental politics and the social sciences

Tuesday 18 December, Graduate School of Education (4th floor)

Organising committee
Dan Butt (SPAIS), Tom Osborne (SPAIS), Margherita Pieraccini (Law)

This workshop gathers together and showcases Bristol University research and expertise in the social sciences and humanities in relation to environmental risk, regulation and justice, especially in the context of climate change.

The aim of the workshop is to connect research in social and political science and law and the humanities, with contemporary environmental and/or climate change issues as they affect and are affected by both politics, policy and law (and the humanities) and expertise within the natural sciences. The intentions are:

1. **To offer accessible social scientific, legal and humanities perspectives on contemporary environmental topics** that will be of interest to those working on the environment and climate change from all disciplines. This will promote interdisciplinary exchange within the University and beyond
2. **To build the foundations of a social science/humanities research cluster** by specifying themes and priorities that will have resonance with issues of environmental regulation, justice and risk associated with the work of the University's Cabot Institute.

The day will consist of four roundtable discussions devoted to themes to do with:
- Uncertainty and risk
- Environmental regulation and policy
- Environmental justice
- A concluding summary roundtable that will seek to summate the issues towards establishing a social science/humanities research network of shared themes that can engage with the natural sciences.

Each roundtable will consist of three to four invited members from the social sciences/humanities side of the University, who will provide a brief outline of their research related to the theme and some of the key issues that arise from it. We have also invited three respondents from the natural science side of the University – Professor Paul Bates (Director of the Cabot Institute) and Dr Mark Siddall (Earth Sciences) – to engage with each roundtable discussion.

Timetable

9 am	Coffee
9.20 am	Short introduction (Tom Osborne)
9.30 am	**First Roundtable: Uncertainty and risk** John Downer Columba Peoples Sue Porter *Respondents: Paul Bates, tba*
11 am	Coffee
11.20 am	**Second Roundtable: Environmental regulation and policy** Chris Deeming Janine Sargoni Chris Preist Margherita Pieraccini *Respondents: Mark Siddall, tba*
1 pm	Lunch
2 pm	**Third Roundtable: Environmental justice** Megan Blomfield Rich Harris Malcolm Fairbrother Dan Butt *Respondents: Mark Siddall, Paul Bates*
3.45 pm	Coffee
4.15 pm	**Fourth Roundtable: Social Sciences/humanities environmental research network cluster – general discussion** Dan Butt Tom Osborne Margherita Pieraccini
5.30 pm	Drinks

Summaries

John Downer (SPAIS)
Governing Complex Systems

The 2011 disaster at Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power station serves as a stark reminder of the risks inherent in our changing relationship with technology. From pacemakers to power-stations, our increasing dependence on complex systems and critical infrastructures has made 'technological risk' a signal feature of the modern socio-political landscape, and 'resilience' an important function of contemporary governance. Such transformations have led to the creation of new regimes of risk assessment and oversight, which in turn has led to new bodies of knowledge and expertise. Increasingly significant societal decisions now hinge on esoteric reliability assessments and hazard calculations, the conclusions of which are often contested and highly politicized. My work draws on the Sociology of Scientific Knowledge (SSK) and Science and Technology Studies (STS) literatures to look critically at these new bodies of expertise. When a government regulator widely declares that living next door to a nuclear plant for fifty years is as safe as 'driving 150 yards' or 'eating a ham sandwich', for instance, where does these knowledge claims come from? What do they ignore? How much faith should we, as citizens and policymakers have in them? These types of questions are important for any democratic polity in a techno-scientific age, and a wide range of social theory can be brought to bear on answering them.

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Columba Peoples (SPAIS)
Framing Security, Framing Ethics: Energy Security and Climate Change in the UK's New Nuclear policy discourse

This presentation assesses the ways in which ethical issues and responsibilities are 'framed' within contemporary policy discourse on nuclear new build in the UK. In particular the presentation focuses on how ethical considerations are conceived of in relation to energy security, environmental issues, and climate change. The latter, the presentation argues, are framed in a way that simplifies and de-politicizes ethical questions and debates associated with nuclear risk and nuclear waste. Instead future energy security is prioritised as an overriding ethical responsibility of government, which in turn has tangible implications for processes of planning, consultation and regulation in relation to the UK's nuclear new build.

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Sue Porter (SPS)
Environmental Hazard & Disabled People: From Vulnerable to Expert to Interconnected

Why are disabled people disproportionately impacted by the impacts of climate change, is it really only their relative poverty that makes them so vulnerable? What might disabled people contribute from their experience of negotiating barriers to designing for disaster planning? Can the lived experience of inter-dependency, rather than individual independence, contribute to the radical rethinking of our relationships with the environment, other sentient beings and each other? I explore possible reasons for the lack of inclusion and diversity within the environmental movement, and suggest that the disability and environmental movements might make common cause. This session reviews the multiple causes of disabled people's vulnerability, and goes on to ask whether the experience of disabled people enables them to become valued contributors, rather than just members of a vulnerable group.

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Chris Deeming (Geography)
New Cultural Contradictions in Consumer Societies

Researchers have long been interested in promoting the social and economic arrangements for human welfare. As our societies become more complex, the challenges we face appear more profound forcing us to rethink our ideas about how we live our lives, our lifestyles and the impacts of our lifestyle choices on others around us.

This study will investigate patterns of household consumption and social impacts within modern consumer high-carbon societies like the UK. The research will examine and report on the distribution of living standards and conditions within and between countries. That some lives are characterised by a lack of resources – 'poor consumers' – while others have excessive lifestyles and consumption levels effecting the wellbeing of others (and future generations) due to luxury emissions, mobile lives, and the by-products of household waste.

In this study, disparities within and between societies, and ethical and global justice issues, come to the fore. The recognition of the need to use our resources better and more fairly, connects with the changing discourse of sustainable social justice.

The findings from this research will feed directly into policy deliberations inside and outside government, including discussion about household consumption, embodied emissions of greenhouse gases by households and the social impacts on living standards, health and wellbeing, and the environment.

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Janine Sargoni (Law)
My socio-legal research aims to characterise the legitimate regulation of geoengineering research. Geoengineering is "*the deliberate large-scale intervention to counteract anthropogenic climate change*" (Royal Society, 2009). I take a critical approach, arguing that regulatory frameworks should be normatively justified in order to be legitimate.

My project has three parts. Firstly, I introduce 'communicative proceduralism' as a mechanism for enhancing participation through procedures and institutions that maximise the possibility of securing legitimacy. Secondly, using the US and EU regulatory frameworks of biotech research as a comparative case study, I attempt to concretise communicative proceduralism.   Here I identify procedural elements of the US framework that enhance the possibility of participation in constructions of risk where scientific uncertainty is high.   These elements include the requirement for regulating agencies to publish in the federal register notices of proposed regulations, take into account all comments submitted in response and the composition of institutions to include non-scientific members. Lastly, I aim to apply the concretised communicative proceduralism prospectively to the regulation of geoengineering research. This application is significant because the regulatory frameworks are likely to operate beyond the state; democratic lines of legitimacy become weaker and procedures that maximise the possibility of securing legitimacy become more salient.

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Chris Preist (Computer Science)
IT and the Environment - Tales from the trenches

This brief talk will not present research, but rather some observations about the interplay between different interests, particularly the corporate sector and the EU, around Information Technology and environmental issues. These are based on my time working at HP representing HPLabs on the HP Global Sustainability Strategy Board, and my subsequent tracking of issues for inclusion on my sustainability unit for computer scientists and electronic engineers.

I will consider the changing role of legislation in the EU; the role of voluntary standards and how they can become de-facto compulsory; the ways companies can use legislation to gain competitive advantage; how government looks to the private sector for answers; and the role of quantification approaches (specifically product life cycle assessment) in shaping policy. Time permitting, I will also discuss the role and expression of personal values around environmental and societal issues in the corporate setting.

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Margherita Pieraccini (Law)
The environmental governance of the commons: nature conservation law and beyond The subject matter of my research, broadly speaking, regards the challenges conservation law (specifically protected areas policy and law) encounters when it attempts to conserve common pool resources. I consider, using a mixture of doctrinal and primary qualitative research, the regulatory strategies of conservation law (designation, management, enforcement) assessing them from a socio-legal and ecological viewpoint by conducting:

1. *Internal* Description and Analysis, asking:
   - What are the substantive and procedural traits of conservation law?
   - How innovative are they are socially and ecologically?
2. *External* Description and Analysis, asking:
   - How does conservation law interact with/acknowledge other forms of environmental governance out there such as property rights, customary law etc..?
   - How does it contribute to or hinder the formation of new regulatory forms?
   - What are the impacts of conservation law on different actors' environmental perceptions and practices and on the environment?

My main focus has been terrestrial protected areas but I have recently started an ESRC-funded project on the establishment of a network of marine protected areas in England that I will briefly introduce.

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Megan Blomfield (Philosophy)
Climate change and justice in the global distribution of natural resources

My research examines the phenomenon of anthropogenic climate change understood as a problem of injustice in the global distribution of control over, and access to, the world's natural resources. In debates about how to deal with climate change, conflicting claims to natural resources constantly arise. These claims can typically be separated into two main kinds. On the one hand, individuals and collectives make claims to shares of natural resources, such as a share of the world's emissions assimilative capacity. On the other hand, claims are made to particular natural resources: for example, indigenous peoples of the Amazon claim rights over parts of the rainforest, and some Canadians claim a national ownership right over the Alberta bitumen sands. These claims, which I term "particular claims"; to natural resources, are not possessed by all human beings but instead link certain individuals or collectives to specific natural resources. I am trying to formulate an account of natural resource justice that can adjudicate between claims to a fair share and claims of a more particular nature, and thereby guide us in determining a just solution to the problem of climate change.

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Rich Harris (Geography)
Faith and Climate Skepticism: Competing Christian theologies of Environmental Stewardship

In his seminal paper, The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis (1967), Lynn White Jr., himself a churchman, argues that "Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt" for the crisis because

Christian theology establishes a dualism of "man and nature" and "that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends." Fourty years later, Jim Wallis, leader of the left-leaning Sojourners group, writes, "The neglect of our natural environment and its degradation is not just bad policy; it is bad theology […] Our private religion has fostered an individualism that has not only diminished our social conscience for the poor but also separated us from the earth itself." However, the rediscovery of theologies of Creation Care and Biblical Stewardship are contested with groups like the Acton Institute and Cornwall Alliance advancing a rhetoric strongly sceptical of anthropomorphic global warming ("someday, this particular eco-horror scam will come to an end"). In this paper I will look at the Christian theologies of Environmental Stewardship, focusing especially on the influence of right-leaning organisations in the United States and their efforts to mesh an economic and political ideology of liberty and liberalism with a populist theology of what is good and Godly.

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Malcolm Fairbrother (Geography)
Environmental Externalities, Justice, and Politics

I recently published an analysis of international survey data, where I showed that people in poor countries are as concerned about the natural environment as are people in rich countries, if not more so. I take this observation as a point of departure in discussing the notion of environmental externalities--a mainstream concept in economics with under-appreciated radical implications. In particular, the notion of externalities implies that environmental problems, by definition, are injustices rooted in the power of some to impose costs on others; such problems are therefore inevitably distributional and political. Nevertheless, an externalities-based perspective rejects other critical/radical theses about the environment. In my talk I will provide a brief overview of this mix of agreements and disagreements.

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Dan Butt (SPAIS)
'A Doctrine Quite New and Altogether Untenable?': How Benefiting From Climate Change Generates Duties to Others

This paper is concerned with the issue of how fairly to allocate the costs of adaptation and mitigation associated with climate change caused by human agency. The paper seeks to defend a version of the "beneficiary pays" principle, which holds that the involuntary receipt of benefits from historic greenhouse gas emissions can give rise to contemporary remedial obligations. Accounts restring on the receipt of involuntary benefit face two hurdles: first, to show that it is at least possible to acquire obligations to others without one's own voluntaristic action, and second, to show that historic emissions are an appropriate instance of this form of benefit. The paper seeks to defend both claims.

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