



Workshop

Organised Business and Environmental Governance in Western Europe after 1945

SNSF Grant : <https://data.snf.ch/grants/grant/10002705>

This workshop is organized within the framework of the research project Organised Business and Environmental Governance in Western Europe [1945–1995] (see project summary at the end of the programme). The project, funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation, runs until February 2029. The workshop aims to bring together a scientific community with shared research interests and to foster discussion on, as well as feedback for, the project team's initial research findings.

16th and 17th April 2026

Room B18.003, Campus UniDistance Suisse
Schinerstrasse 18, 3900 Brig

Programme

Thursday 16 April 2026

- 13:00-13:45 Research Project Presentation (1): Environmental Governance and Sustainability Management
- SNSF Grant- Organised Business and Environmental Governance in Western Europe after 1945
PI: Sabine Pitteloud, UniDistance Suisse
 - NWO Vici "Managing Scarcity and Sustainability," VI.C.191.067
PI: Cyrus Mody, Maastricht University
 - Chair and discussant: Neil Rollings, University of Glasgow
- 13:45-14:00 Coffee break
- 14:00-16:00 Panel 1: Organized Business and Regulatory Harmonization
- A negative Brussel effect? The UNICE and the Europeanization of the Environment in the 1970s
Sabine Pitteloud, UniDistance Suisse
 - Climate Risk Management in the European Union
Grace Ballor, Bocconi University
 - The CNPF, the French Government and the Origins of Sectoral Agreements
Arthur Delacquis Sorbonne Université and Léna Perrinet, EHESS
 - French Public-Private Strategies in Response to the 1972 Stockholm Conference
Christophe Bonneuil, CNRS/EHESS
 - Discussant: Thomas David, University of Lausanne
 - Chair: Sandra Bott, University of Lausanne
- 13:45-14:00 Coffee break
- 14:00-16:00 Panel 2: Capitalists and the Environment in Italy
- Confindustria Facing National and International Regulation in the 1970s
Michele Sollai, University of Basel
 - The Discovery of Sustainable Development: The Political Debate in Italy from the Early 1980s until the End of the 'First Republic'
Chiara Zampieri, University of Padua
 - ENI: Green or Black? ENI and the concept of sustainable development, 1989-1993
Fabienne Jouty, Sorbonne University
 - Discussant: Marco Bertilorenzi, University of Padova
 - Chair: Alessandro Ambrosino, UniDistance Suisse

Thursday 17 April 2026

08:30-09:15 Research Project Presentation (2): Visions and Theories of Sustainability

ERC Starting Grant ETRANHET - Energy Transitions in the History of
Economic Thought (19th-20th c.)

PI: Antoine Missemmer, CIRED

Swedish Research Council (Grant No 2023-01137) International Business in
Global Climate Governance Be-tween Stockholm and Kyoto

PI: Ann-Kristin Bergquist, Uppsala University Co-applicants: Thomas
David

Chair and discussant: Antoine Acker, University of Geneva

09:15-09:30 Coffee break

09:30-11:00 Panel 3 Business actors and Water Pollution

Channels of Power: British and West German Business Interest Associations
in EC Water Governance

Frieda Ottman, LMU Munich

Pollution and Political Conflicts Around the Rhine

Anna Corsten, Universität Jena

Private Solutions or Regulations to Clean the Rhine? Swiss

Naomi Denzer, UniDistance Suisse/ UZH)

Discussant: Giacomo Parrinello, SciencePo Paris

Chair: Debjani Bhattacharyya, University of Zurich

Project Description: Organised Business and Environmental Governance in Western Europe [1945-1995]

This project focuses on the role of European business interests associations (BIAs) in defining business strategies regarding increased environmental problems and regulatory pressures from 1945 to the mid-1990s. It draws primarily on the archives of peak-level business associations from Germany, Switzerland and Britain, France and Italy, named respectively the Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie (BDI), the Schweizerische Handels- und Industrieverein (SHIV), the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), the Conseil National du Patronat Français (CNPF) and the Confindustria, which regrouped regional chambers of commerce and sectoral business associations as well as individual companies.

Enterprises, through the exploitation of natural resources, the use of chemical components and the wastes resulting from their production, were often at the centre of political attention. New regulations would not only impose new constraints that might impact profitability, but would also discriminate between different sectors, create competitive advantages for companies mastering the cleanest technologies and create market barriers if solutions were to be implemented at the national level. Consequently, what was at stake for companies was crucial and it should not be assumed that businesses and their interest organisations unequivocally and homogeneously opposed environmental regulation.

Viewed from the standpoint of peak level business associations, the project strives to provide insight on business coordination mechanisms regarding environmental issues, to investigate the extent to which competing companies and a variety of different polluting sectors were able to present their common policy position to national governments as well as cooperate within European BIAs such as the Council of European Industrial Federations (CEIF) and Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe (UNICE). In particular, the study emphasizes the importance of the institutionalization of the environmental question in the 1970s, with the establishment of Environmental ministries in various European countries. Such increased politicisation prompted BIAs to establish ties with the new environmental bodies and to shift their focus from technical solutions and sectoral issues such as water, soil and air pollution, to increasingly tackle general principles of environmental policy. Moreover, focusing on five national business interest organisations with common concerns (albeit from different institutional settings) allows a comparison of the impact of such diversity on the political outcomes. For instance, some contextual and institutional particularities such as the French economic planning tradition, the German highly politicized green movements or the Swiss direct democracy resulted in different challenges for BIAs.

This historical investigation will also assess business interest organisations' role in providing expertise to shape the terms of the environmental debates and devise alternatives to regulation such as private governance tools. The definition of concepts of environmental governance such as the best available technology or the polluter-pay principle are indeed much controversial and subject to power struggles. It is therefore crucial to study the role BIAs, which enjoyed official consultation rights towards national governments and the European Economic Community, played in drawing the boundaries of these notions and integrating them in the regulation, or on the contrary, in proposing alternatives such as self-regulation or financial incentives. The foreseen project will therefore add to the business history literature that has recently started to tackle the role that business has played in environmental governance and will complement the history of environmental regulations and technical standards in Europe by focusing on non-state actors and opening the black box of "business interests".