Legitimation strategies for coal exits in Germany and Canada

21 May 2021

Ending our dependence on coal is essential for effective climate protection. Nevertheless, efforts to phase out coal trigger anxiety and resistance, particularly in mining regions. The governments of both Canada and Germany have involved various stakeholders to develop recommendations aimed at delivering just transitions and guiding structural change. In a new study, researchers at the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS) compare the stakeholder commissions convened by the two countries, drawing on expert interviews with their members, and examine how governments use commissions to legitimize their transition policies.

In focus: Climate justice, just transitions, and energy justice

In both cases, the governments pursued their legitimation strategies in a two-stage process, explains Gürtler: "Governments involved stakeholders, who in turn had to respond to the expectations of various societal groups. In the process, negotiations engaged with very different ideas of justice: Climate justice, fair transitions, energy justice." The Canadian task force had a strong focus on affected regions and on identifying and representing the needs of communities; in the case of the German Coal Commission, a wide range of stakeholders—from industry associations and trade unions to scientists and environmental activists—brought their concerns to the table.

In early 2019 the Canadian task force presented the government with recommendations for a plan of action, which the government intends to implement.
within the framework of its proposed Just Transition Act. This legislation has not yet been passed, however. In Germany, the Coal Commission negotiated a minimal compromise, which was only partially adopted by the federal government. The implementation of this compromise has since been questioned by former members of the Coal Commission and could be overtaken by new developments, such as the ruling of the Federal Constitutional Court on the Climate Protection Act.