



Governing the invisible: Policy approaches to micropollutants in water

Workshop, November 13-14, 2019

Heidelberg University, International Academic Forum Heidelberg

We invite you to participate in a workshop on the governance of micropollutants in waters. Micropollutants are chemical substances present in very small concentrations (ng/L to µg/L) in waters due to anthropogenic activities. After their usage, micropollutants end up in wastewater and enter surface waters without being completely filtered in sewage treatment plants. Concentrations of micropollutants in surface waters have increased in the last decades, partly due to increasing consumption of pharmaceuticals and agricultural intensification.

Various scientific disciplines have conducted research on micropollutants in waters in the past. Biologists and ecotoxicologists have investigated potential negative effects of micropollutants on the aquatic ecosystem, toxicologists have examined potential effects on human health, and engineers have explored new filtration techniques to reduce the entry of micropollutants into waters. Due to these efforts, policymakers in some European countries have paid increasing attention to micropollutants and initiated a 'top-down' political process. In Germany, for example, the German Federal Ministry of the Environment initiated a stakeholder consultation in 2016 to inform a federal policy strategy on micropollutants. In addition, the same ministry kicked-off a national dialogue on water in October 2018 to discuss future challenges for water protection where micropollutants will be one of the topics dealt with. Last but not least, several German Länder turned their attention towards micropollutants including the state of Baden-Württemberg. Efforts in promoting research on water include initiating a Water Research Network and, among others, the funding of the interdisciplinary research project Effect-Net, which investigates micropollutants in surface waters.

As the topic is now on the political agenda, the governance of micropollutants comes into play. Contamination by micropollutants represents a complex problem that challenges policymakers in their efforts to find adequate solutions. There are several reasons for the issue's complexity: First, there is a multitude of entry sources, many different actors and interests involved (e.g.: environmental organizations, consumer protection, farmers' associations, pharmaceutical industry, energy industry, and the water treatment sector) as well as overlapping policy fields. Second, causes and effects are transboundary and, therefore, transnational solutions are needed. Third, the risk of micropollutants is characterized by uncertainty as the effects of a multitude of compounds and their interactions in water on humans and the environment are not well understood yet. The complexity of the issue poses a particular challenge for governance leading to several unanswered political questions. This, in turn, makes it especially interesting to study from a social science perspective. Research questions include: How can we explain different levels of political and public attention for micropollutants? What factors explain differences in policy responses between countries? Why do we predominantly observe a 'top-



down' political process that mostly lacks public attention and 'bottom-up' mobilization? Who are the main actors relevant for the governance of micropollutants? What positions do they take and what strategies do they use to advance their interests? How can we explain diverging political party positions on how to address the issue? What factors are conducive for agreeing on adequate policy solutions? Does nexus thinking help to find more sustainable solutions? How does the uncertainty inherent in micropollutants affect individuals' problem perception?

Overall, micropollutants represent an emerging policy issue of high uncertainty and complexity, making it especially interesting to study from a social science perspective. To date, empirical studies analyzing the policy field from this perspective are scarce and several research gaps remain.

This workshop aims at bringing together researchers with different disciplinary backgrounds and an interest in the governance of micropollutants for water quality protection. To answer the type of questions posed above and fill corresponding research gaps, we believe an interdisciplinary exchange of ideas will be helpful. Due to the issue's complexity, an interdisciplinary approach might even be necessary. The idea is to outline remaining research gaps, discuss research questions and prepare the ground for future research collaborations. Participants will be asked to prepare a short memo (about 500 words) sketching research questions, research gaps, hypotheses, potential theoretical approaches as well as useful methods for future research on micropollutants in waters based on their own research. We will explicitly aim for joint outputs as a result of the workshop. One idea is to propose a conference panel or joint section which could then result in a special issue. The format will be open to discussion at the workshop.

APPLICATION

Participation in the workshop is free of charge. You only have to cover accommodation and travel expenses. For application, we ask you to write a short abstract (about half a page) where you sketch research questions and topics related to micropollutants you are interested in. In case you have already conducted some research on water governance, you can also add a few sentences about your work. The abstract should also include your name, position and affiliation. Please apply via e-mail by sending your abstract to Simon Schaub (simon.schaub@ipw.uni-heidelberg.de). We kindly ask you to apply until August 31, 2019. We will respond to your application within 14 days.

LOCATION

The workshop will take place at the International Academic Forum Heidelberg, which is situated in the Altstadt right in the center of Heidelberg.

ACCOMMODATION

The International Academic Forum Heidelberg also includes a guesthouse which offers a limited number of rooms and apartments (one to four beds). Prices range from 79€ to 130€ per room or apartment depending on the type of accommodation and the number of people willing to share a room or apartment.

ORGANIZATION

The workshop is organized by Simon Schaub (Institute of Political Science, Heidelberg University) and Sanam Vardag (Heidelberg Center for the Environment, Heidelberg University).



PRELIMINARY PROGRAM

Wednesday, November 13

- 10:00 Arrival, greetings and introduction
- 11:00 Presentation of memos prepared by the participants
- 13:00 *Lunch (at the venue)*
- 14:00 Formation of smaller working groups
- 14:30 Brainstorming and collecting ideas for future research in smaller working groups
- 16:00 *Coffee-break (at the venue)*
- 16:30 Sketching research designs in smaller working groups
- 18:30 *Dinner (at the venue)*

Thursday, November 14

- 10:00 Presentation of collected ideas and developed research designs
- 11:30 *Coffee-break (at the venue)*
- 12:00 Discussion of the format of joint outputs
- 13:00 *Lunch (at the venue)*
- 14:00 Developing joint outputs (proposal for conference panel, joint section, special issue, etc.)
- 16:30 *Departure*

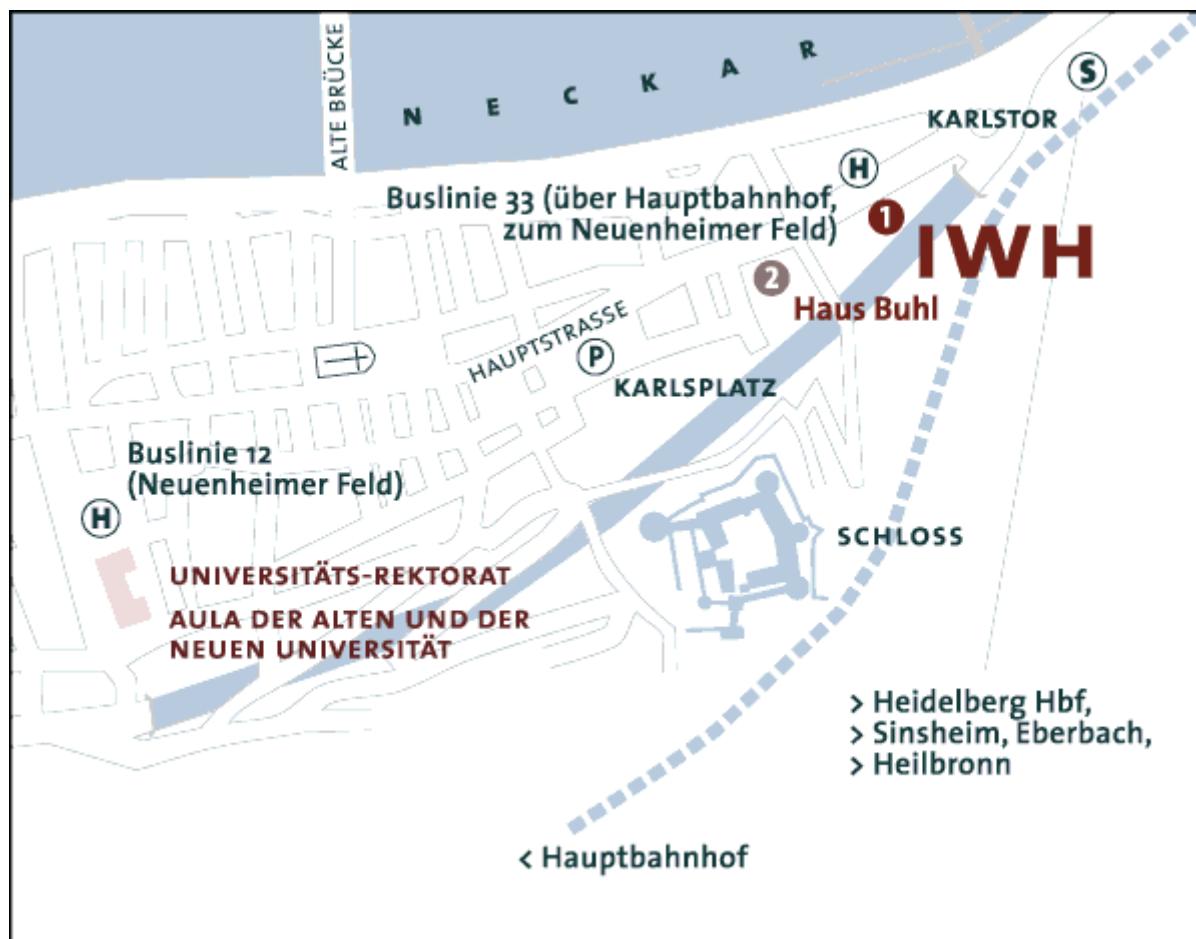
Funded by

Scientific support by



DIRECTIONS

Internationales Wissenschaftsforum Heidelberg
(International Academic Forum Heidelberg)
Hauptstraße 242
69117 Heidelberg



We thank the International Academic Forum Heidelberg for providing their premises.