

Imagineries of the sustainable state in Europe: ecological modernity, environmental stewardship, energy security, and green growth

Amanda Machin^a , Gloria Ziglioli^a , Fabio Schojan^{a,b}  and Alexander Ruser^a 

^aDepartment of Sociology and Social Work, University of Agder, Kristiansand, Norway; ^bWuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy, Wuppertal, Germany

ABSTRACT

State governments around the world have pledged to decarbonize their economies and facilitate a sustainability transformation. But transformation requires imagination; the possibilities for the state to promote, forge, or obstruct a path toward a more sustainable future hinge not only on the ability to make strategic policy revisions but more fundamentally on the political imagineries that help to configure the expectations of policymakers and the public about what is possible and feasible—and what is not. This article offers a comparative analysis of imagineries of the “sustainable state” appearing in key policy documents and strategies in four countries. Using critical discourse analysis, we map four imagineries: *ecological modernity* in Germany; *ecological stewardship* in Norway, *energy security* in Italy, and *green growth* in the UK. The article thus offers insight into the different expectations in relation to agency, technology, temporality, and rationality in driving and maintaining sustainability and reflects upon the impact of these imagineries. Our analysis indicates that while these imagineries of the sustainable state vary significantly, they generally promote technological innovation and market mechanisms and cover up some of the inevitable disagreements and challenges of transformation.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 14 February 2025
Accepted 22 September 2025



KEYWORDS

Sustainability;
transformation; imagineries;
state governance;
environmental politics

Introduction

Governments around the world have pledged to decarbonize their economies and societies and facilitate a sustainability transformation (Tobin et al. 2018). Although the dynamics of transformation occur across different systems and levels of governance (Leach et al. 2010), states remain key actors (Barry and Eckersley 2005; Tobin and Wylie 2021) and scholars of environmental politics and policymaking have emphasized the importance of “bringing the state back in” to their research (Duit et al., 2016, 2; Hausknot and Hammond 2020; Johnstone and Newell 2018). Literature referring to “the green state” (Eckersley 2004), “the ecostate” (Meadowcroft 2005), the “green entrepreneurial state” (Mazzucato 2015), “the environmental state” (Duit et al. 2016), and “the sustainable state” (Borneman, Marius, and Burger 2025) offers different descriptive and normative accounts of the instruments, capacities, and limits of states to drive sustainability transformation.

As Martin Jänicke observed over 30 years ago, multiple interrelating factors contribute to a state’s success in dealing with environmental problems (Jänicke 1992). And yet, while there is disagreement about the most important drivers and obstacles, it has been convincingly argued that the possibilities for the state to forge a path toward a more sustainable future hinge not only on the ability to make strategic policy revisions, but more fundamentally upon the collective imagination (Hammond 2021; Machin 2022a; Milkoreit 2017). Basil Bornemann and colleagues, for example, call for “imaginative reforms” of state governance (Borneman, Marius, and Burger 2025, 18). Marit Hammond (2021) underlines the role of “imaginative impulses” that can put states on different tracks.

CONTACT Amanda Machin  amanda.machin@uia.no  Department of Sociology and Social Work, University of Agder, Universitetsbveien 25, 4630 Kristiansand, Norway

© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

For this reason, it is important to attend to the dynamic and competing political imaginaries at play in and around state policymaking on sustainability. This premise is the starting point of this article. As we explain in more detail below, political imaginaries constitute the widely shared conception of what politics is and how it is supposed to work. They orient meaningful political action and interaction, inform the expectations of policymakers and the public about what is possible and feasible—and what is not. Imaginaries do more than reflect dominant ideals; they creatively contribute to those ideals, working to configure social practices and political institutions, enabling processes, shaping decisions, and legitimizing representative claims (Adams et al. 2015, 19; Browne and Diehl 2019). We follow literature that contends that imaginaries can play a significant role in facilitating, guiding, and obstructing environmental governance and delimiting the relevant pathways, actors, timelines, and relevant knowledges and technologies (Death 2022; Hatzisavvidou 2024; Klüh et al. 2024; Levy and Spicer 2013; Machin 2022a; 2022b; Milkoreit 2017; Miller 2020; Pigott 2018; Steinberg et al. 2015; Tozer and Klenk 2018).

The article identifies, compares, and assesses some of the political imaginaries of the sustainable state that circulate in Europe and their reification and capacitation of certain strategies, institutions, technologies, and subjects—and preclusion and disempowerment of others. Using critical discourse analysis, we examine authoritative policy documents that describe key environmental strategies of four European countries: Germany, Italy, Norway, and the UK. We focus particularly on the different constructions and patterns of agency, technology, temporality, and rationality within these imaginaries. We do not try to measure or rank the relative success or failure of the environmental policymaking of the four states and their imaginaries. Nor are we arguing that these imaginaries are necessarily dominant across all parts of society. Rather, we are interested in teasing out some of the similarities and differences that may have an impact not only on the extent, speed, and success of transformation but also on social inclusion, democracy, and justice. By bringing to light some of the imaginaries of “the sustainable state” in Europe, the article makes a contribution to literature on state governance of sustainability and raises questions about the possibilities of transformation without the emergence, circulation, and salience of more radical imaginaries.

In the next section, we describe in greater detail our understanding of political imaginaries and their relevance for sustainability, transformation, and the state. We next explain our methods and material before presenting our comparative analysis of the political imaginaries of the sustainable state. In our analysis, we map out four imaginaries—*ecological modernity* in Germany, *ecological stewardship* in Norway, *energy security* in Italy, and *green growth* in the UK, noting both differences and commonalities, and highlight some of the implications of these imaginaries for democracy, sustainability, citizens, and human and nonhuman others. We conclude by calling for the circulation of more radical imaginaries in the struggle for a green, democratic, and just transformation.

Political imaginaries and transformation

Scholars have increasingly turned to the imagination to understand the dynamics of contemporary societies that conventional approaches to political science arguably struggle to grasp (Browne and Diehl 2019). The imagination is not understood by these scholars as imitative of reality, but rather as a realm in which modes of existence are sculpted and the conditions are laid for concrete interventions (Yusoff and Gabrys 2011).

If the *imagination* can sometimes be understood as a faculty of the individual mind, the term *imaginary* in general refers to a widely shared social structure (Adams et al. 2015, 16). Much of the recent work on imaginaries draws on that of Cornelius Castoriadis (1987, 1993) and Charles Taylor (2004), who have underlined the central role of imaginaries that construct and support society. For Castoriadis, it is impossible to fully grasp society without considering its imaginaries, since it is through an imaginary that every society constitutes its own reality (1987, 169). Imaginaries, he explains, have “instituting power” (1993, 103). Taylor (2004, 24) emphasizes the broadness and depth of a social imaginary that allows social action and interaction and which he refers to as the “largely unstructured and inarticulate understanding of our whole situation” (Taylor 2004, 28).

Political imaginaries, as a particular type of imaginaries, are the background understandings of *political* reality in which representatives, citizens, and denizens are affectively invested and that enable political practices, underpin the functioning of institutions, and guide decision making. They allow political actors to “go on” in a complex world (Adams et al. 2012; Jessop 2012). Different political imaginaries both reflect and shape competing constructions of democracy (Machin 2025), of collective memory (Hatzisavvidou 2024), of welfare (Murphy 2021), and of “the people” (Diehl 2019). Imaginaries produce coherent visions of the past and the future and of the pathways through which we travel from one to the other. Although there are multiple approaches to, and uses of, imaginaries, scholars agree that interrogation of extant political imaginaries and the conditions for the emergence of new ones is crucial for grasping the opportunities and obstacles for sustainability transformation. Political action, as Shelia Jasanoff (2015, 331) points out, is “profoundly imaginative.” The content and the boundaries of political imaginaries thus help to determine the pace and agent of change and its horizon of possibility.

This article identifies the imaginaries of sustainable states in Europe that appear in authoritative government documents and that reflect, justify, and influence policymaking at the state level—and that therefore may impact society more broadly. Government innovations on sustainability put in motion imaginaries that present particular trajectories of transformation that may mobilize or disengage (Pigott 2018). This is not to say that imaginaries can always be deliberately chosen and enforced by those in power. Imaginaries are, on the contrary, co-produced by many different actors and institutions—public officials, social movements, scientists, artists, journalists, experts, and citizens (Jasanoff 2015; Milkoreit 2017, 9). In our analysis, then, we do not seek so much to uncover the motives or agents *behind* an imaginary of the sustainable state as to highlight and compare its most prominent features. Before presenting our results, we explain in the following section our methods and cases.

Method and materials

Imaginaries are difficult to capture, and there is no agreement on the proper method to assess them (Rudek 2022). Imaginaries, as we understand them, cannot easily be put into words; they work at a visual, affective, and often unconscious level (Arruda 2015, 129). We therefore use a multi-modal critical discourse analysis (CDA) to identify and map the political imaginaries of the sustainable state in four countries.

CDA refers to a set of approaches that is used, applied, and developed by many scholars with varied disciplinary backgrounds, research methods, agendas, and tools. The manifold differences notwithstanding, what all these approaches have in common is the general idea that CDA is “critical” in the sense that it attends to power relations, contradictions, exclusions, and inequalities in social interaction (van Dijk 2015; Wodak 1999, 186). CDA does not simply *describe* discourses but also *evaluates* them in terms of their impact on society, alignment with certain values, relation to social wrongs, and their impact on the production and disruption of hegemonies (Fairclough 2013). Although there has traditionally been a focus on spoken and written texts, CDA also attends to other semiotic elements of a discourse that play a role in producing meaning (Fairclough 2013; Machin and Mayr 2013). We explicitly attend to images through a multi-modal version of CDA (Machin and Mayr 2013: 363). According to Ruth Wodak (2014, 304), the aim of CDA is to “make the implicit explicit.” Our aim, then, is to “make the implicit explicit” by identifying, describing, and comparing the constructions of agency, technologies, temporalities, and rationalities appearing in the political imaginaries of the sustainable state.

Table 1. Case selection.

Criteria	Germany	Norway	Italy	UK
Geographical Position	Central	North	South	West
Member of EU	Yes	No	Yes	No
Climate Change Performance Index*	16	9	43	6
Vulnerability/Readiness**	8	1	36	6

* From the 2025 *Climate Change Performance Index Report* (<https://ccpi.org>).

** From the ND-GAIN country index (<https://gain-new.crc.nd.edu/ranking/vulnerability>).

As shown in Table 1, our case selection of the four states offers geographical variation and differences in relation to European Union (EU) membership, indicating that the states have dissimilar concerns and interests with regard to climate change and that we can expect to capture distinct imaginaries in our analysis. Indeed, the four states show different levels of ambition and performance in relation to environmental policy and vulnerability to climate change. Although ambition and performance are difficult to measure, there are indices providing a ranking of the different countries that offer a helpful approximation, and that are included in Table 1. As Annex I and II parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), all four countries are committed to “nationally determined contributions” (United Nations 2015; Dubash 2021), and therefore, we could expect to find comprehensive national strategies for our analysis. Finally, our selection is also partially determined by our collective linguistic competencies; a prerequisite for providing reliable and nuanced descriptions of country-specific imaginaries is that we could read the material in the respective original languages.

First, Germany has enshrined ambitious climate targets in the 2019 Federal Climate Change Act (OECD 2023). Its “Energiewende,” through which nuclear and fossil fuels will be replaced by renewable energy, is widely celebrated, although also criticized from across the political spectrum in Germany (Krüger 2022). Germany is regarded as a leader of environmental policymaking—although there is some skepticism around these claims (Haas 2021); the country’s impressive emissions reductions since 1990 are at least in part due to the shutting of East German powerplants and industry following reunification, for safety and efficiency reasons as much as anything else (Tobin and Wylie 2021, 94).

Second, Norway has been called a “frontrunner” in environmental policy and is a heavy investor in technological innovation for sustainability transformation (OECD 2022a). It is nearly self-sufficient in renewable energy (Hansen and Moe 2022). As an oil-producing state, however, Norway faces a growing tension between petroleum production and sustainability and criticism for the separation of these two policy areas (Bang and Lahn 2020).

Third, Italy is vulnerable to a range of natural hazards and is highly dependent on imports of energy (OECD 2013). And yet historically, the environment was not awarded a high priority in its national politics (Ghinoi and Steiner 2020, 217; OECD 2013). Despite ranking second in 2014 (behind Germany) for deployment of renewables in Europe, Italy more recently has become a frontrunner in dismantling European renewable energy policy (Prontera 2021, 1196).

Finally, the UK has a mixed track record of ambitious targets and underwhelming environmental policy (Carter and Pearson 2022; OECD 2022b). Presently, the country is seen as lagging far behind other European countries, which may be at least partly the outcome of the tendency of the government’s refusal to act as a strong regulator (Bloomfield and Steward, 2024, 304) but also its “anti-net zero populism” (Paterson et al. 2024).

The strategies of the four states for pursuing sustainability are laid out in publications that we took as primary material. Although clearly there are many documents on sustainability and environmental policy, we limited our analysis to documents published by national/state agencies (see Table 2).

We conducted an initial exploratory reading of the words and images¹ in the documents to inspect the overall content and to determine an initial coding system for our analysis.² This was followed

Table 2. Material selection.

State	Germany	Norway	Italy	UK
Name of report	1. <i>Klimaschutzprogramm der Bundesregierung</i> (Climate Action Programme of the Federal Government) 2. Update of the Integrated National Climate and Energy Plan (NECP) for Germany	1. Norway’s Climate Action Plan for 2021–2030 2. <i>Klima i Endring—sammen for et klimarobust samfunn</i> (A Changing Climate—Together for a Climate-proof Society)	<i>Piano Nazionale Integrato per l’Energia e il Clima (PNIEC)</i> (National Integrated Plan for Energy and Climate)	1. Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener 2. UK Net Zero Research and Innovation Framework
Author	Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action	Ministry of Climate and Environment	Ministry for Environment and Energy Security (Synthesis)	UK HM Government
Year	1. 2023 2. 2024	1. 2022 2. 2023	2024	1. 2021 2. 2023
Page extent	1. 27 2. 417	1. 232 2. 84	488	1. 368 2. 93

by several readings as part of an “abductive process” of moving back and forth between the empirical material and our theoretical assumptions (Wodak 1999). Our readings allowed us to highlight prevalent features of the imaginaries and to test and refine the code structure. By comparing the findings, we arrived at four main code categories:

1. Agencies: *Who* are the agents of the sustainable state? What is the role of the state and other actors (e.g., citizens, residents, markets, civil society) in sustainability governance?
2. Technologies: *How* is the state to achieve sustainability? Which instruments, systems, and forms of knowledge are needed for sustainability?
3. Temporalities: *When* does a sustainable state emerge? Does it exist in the present or in the future? How does the pathway to sustainability unfold?
4. Rationalities: *Why* is sustainability important? On what basis is policy and transformation justified?

We attended to both words and images in the documents to populate these categories for each country, examining who and what is (and is not) represented as central to sustainability transformation and governance, the depiction of the pace and scope of events and processes, and the justification and legitimization of policy on sustainability.

Imaginaries of the sustainable state in Europe

Germany and the imaginary of ecological modernity

Germany, as indicated above, has frequently portrayed itself as a leader of environmental politics (Schreurs 2016, 114), with a strong presence of environmental movements, an abundance of environmental legislation, and an active and successful Green Party, which was, in 1998, the first such party to be elected into the federal government (Haas 2021).

Indeed, scholars widely describe Germany as a pioneer of strong “ecological modernization” (Dryzek et al. 2002, 674; Jänicke and Jörgens 2023; Tobin and Wylie 2021, 94). Ecological modernization involves the transition away from a polluting economy to an environmentally friendly one through investment in technological development. Technological innovation and economic competitiveness and environmental protection are not seen as contradictory in this imaginary, but on the contrary are expected to be mutually reinforcing (Machin 2019; Schojan et al. 2024).

It is not surprising, then, that the dominant imaginary we find in the material of the German government is that of *ecological modernity*. In this imaginary, climate protection drives the innovation and development of future technologies and of German industry as well as energy security. As the document *Klimaschutzprogramm der Bundesregierung* (The Federal Government’s Climate-Protection Program) states, “The transition to climate neutrality offers many opportunities for a good future” (BMWK 2023, 1).

This document is an updated version of an earlier Climate Action Program from 2016 and outlines the German government’s key policy agendas to tackle climate change. It emphasizes a plurality of different technologies, including e-fuels, hydrogen, and carbon capture and storage (CCS), and portrays digitalization as supportive of sustainability (rather than a drain on energy and resources). What is of interest here is not only that this technological plurality builds the picture of German industrial strength, innovation capacity, and leadership, but that these are technologies that have not yet been fully developed to support energy transition, but are *imagined as being so in the future*, giving this imaginary a distinct temporality of deferred innovation.

Crucial here is the *active* role played by the state as the primary agent in the imaginary. Traditionally, Germany has been known for its corporatism—a model of governing in which the state coordinates the negotiations between social and economic actors and for consensus-based decision making (Streeck 1999). The country’s environmental policy has, in the past, been built on the support of industry (Knill and Lenschow 1998). This resonates with the idea of the *Vater Staat* and the state as a fatherly figure or caretaker who functions as a “moderator” of equal ownership of progress (Schimank 2009).

Indeed, in this imaginary of the sustainable state, the state assumes the role of moderator in climate action while protecting both economy and society from the urgent danger of climate change. The German Federal Government is given the responsibility of tackling climate change while simultaneously maintaining living standards and economic competitiveness, ensuring social justice by “securing a life of prosperity for all people in this country” and “protecting the freedom of future generations” (BMWK 2023, 1). This win-win picture is one from which it is hard to dissent—the imaginary of *ecological modernity* smooths over any ideological discord or material hardship and puts Germany as an innovator of environmental policy and technological development on the pathway to a clean green future.

Norway and the imaginary of ecological stewardship

The government of Norway has pledged to be entirely carbon neutral by 2030 and is renowned for its green investments. As the homeland of Gro Harlem Brundtland, it might be expected that the country would be a leader in environmental policy. However, and in contrast to Germany, scholars have described Norway as promoting “*weak ecological modernization*” (Dryzek et al. 2002). This is because of the active inclusion of civil society organizations as “arms of the state,” which undermines their potential to ask critical questions (Dryzek et al. 2002, 670; Fasting and Sørensen 2021, 151).

It is indeed striking that while the imaginary presents the Norwegian state as a principal agent positioned to set targets, to regulate, restrict, and monitor, it also at the same time portrays the state working alongside an active society in which all public authorities, businesses and industries, civil society, families, and individuals contribute to reaching the national climate goals. In contrast to the German imaginary, in which the state is a coordinator of negotiation, here the state plays the role of *partner* with the whole community. Agency is therefore given to “everyone.” Conflict, tradeoffs, or losses are notably absent in this imaginary, whereas “joint effort” is expected from across Norwegian society.

We label the imaginary in the Norwegian documents as *environmental stewardship*. Environmental stewardship aligns with the ethics of collective ecological management and the intertwining of nature and identity (Barry and Smith 2008, 565). In this imaginary, protection of the environment is simultaneously the conservation of the traditional Norwegian way of life, characterized by outdoor activities and embedded in nature. The portrayal of climate change as a threat to this way of life reflects, on one hand, the expectation that sustainability involves a series of holistic tasks for all, and on the other, the tendency to portray Nordic cultures as homogenous (Keskinen et al. 2019, 1).

The identity of Norwegian culture as inseparable from the natural environment is further reified by the frequent use of images of children playing outdoors and of distinctively Nordic landscapes of glaciers, mountains, rivers, and forests. Just over a third of the images in the documents that we analyzed (21 out of 62) showed Norway’s pristine nature and wilderness and four more were of children and outdoor activities. Noticeably, however, coverage of the identity and agency of indigenous peoples is very sketchy. Only one image—a picture of grazing reindeer—represented the indigenous Sámi culture. Ironically, however, diminishing areas for reindeer herding have been blamed by scholars on the green colonialist tendencies of the Scandinavian renewable energy transition (Kuokkanen 2023).

The climate-action plan certainly, albeit briefly, addresses the vulnerability of traditional Sámi lifestyles and cultural practices to climate change (Norwegian Ministry of Climate and the Environment 2023, 30). The documents also acknowledge that the Sámi peoples have special knowledge about living in the Arctic. However, this indigenous knowledge is not mentioned as part of finding solutions to climate change and other environmental concerns.

Instead, emphasis is placed on the importance of global scientific expertise as the dominant “technology” of the imaginary. Reflecting this characterization were the frequent appearances of illustrations of scientific information, appearing in the form of graphs and maps (26 out of 62 images). A particularity of this imaginary is that it includes the preservation of domestic oil and gas production, albeit in a new, “greener” form. New technologies and prototypes such as oil tankers powered by volatile organic compounds (VOCs) (Norwegian Ministry of Climate and the Environment 2022, 100,

102) and retrofitted oil-supply ships, that can use more sustainable ammonia as fuel are presented as essential tools to reduce the carbon emissions stemming from the extraction and transport of oil and natural gas (noticeably without factoring in the emissions from the use of these fossil fuels abroad).

According to this imaginary, then, sustainable transformation is *not* conceived as an aspirational goal only to be realized *in the future*. The temporality in this imaginary is distinct: Norway has *already* begun to deploy technologies, implement regulatory measures, and develop public awareness to preserve what Norway has—not for distant future generations but for Norwegians today. In short, sustainability is important to the country because it is essential for being Norwegian. By drawing on scientific expertise, promoting green technologies, and encouraging everyone to support sustainable transformation, the Norwegian state is *already* protecting the Norwegian way of life.

Italy and the imaginary of energy security

Unlike the imaginaries of Germany and Norway, the imaginary we find in Italy does not place the state in a leadership position. On the contrary, the imaginary we find in the Italian document presents a reluctant, passive, and, to some extent, skeptical state with regard to climate change and renewable energy policy. Such passivity to climate policy is displayed not only by the blatant lack of ambitious targets but also through the emphasis on compliance with only the very minimum requirements for decarbonization set out at the European level of governance, which are depicted as *external* obligations. Explicit criticism is directed toward the previous national plan issued in 2019 for setting “very ambitious sectoral and comprehensive targets, in some cases higher than the mandatory ones” (Italian Government 2024, 5).

Environmental issues have traditionally only had a marginal position in Italian politics (Ghinoi and Steiner 2020). Historically, parties of the right have campaigned and governed against climate-change initiatives (Prontera 2021) and the current government, led by Prime Minister and leader of the far-right Brothers of Italy Party, Giorgia Meloni, is not an exception. So, while the release of the first National Integrated Plan for Energy and Climate in 2019 might have provided the opportunity for a change of direction in the Italian political debate about climate change, pointing toward a more active and dutiful strategy of framing, assessing, and tackling climate change and related issues, the revised version of the plan presented in Summer 2024 clearly pursues the goal of dismantling renewable energy policy (Prontera 2021). The document seems to be aligned with the portrayal of energy transition by many contemporary European far-right parties as a threat to national sovereignty (Campolongo et al. 2024; Machin and Ruser 2019).

In the National Integrated Plan for Energy and Climate, Italy is depicted as potentially playing a leading role in regional energy security through strategic positioning as a Mediterranean hub for natural gas, allowing the country to reduce its energy dependence on any single country, in a context of global instability. Our analysis, therefore, detects here an imaginary of energy security, in which the pathway toward decarbonization is desirable insofar as it provides energy independence and freedom, as well as a political and economic opportunity to both strengthen the national economy and to regain strategic centrality in the European Community.

This imaginary involves a mix of technological solutions, one of which is nuclear power, indicating a renaissance of the Italian nuclear industry (Catanzaro 2023) that was once a pioneer (Di Nucci 2006). Its temporality is characterized by a certain level of urgency but also a level of orderliness, “a moment to rethink the system” (Italian Government 2024, 5) and a “prudent and realistic” set of strategies and actions while transitioning to a decarbonized economy and society (Italian Government 2024, 7–9).

The imaginary is distinctly technocratic, as is illustrated by the fact that of the many images in the documents, none were actual pictures. Instead, all 98 images were of figures or graphs displaying economic statistics, financial information, and technical measurements—for example, representations of the “Italian boot” that showed national gas grids, pipelines, and sites for various planned activities.

Interestingly, however, an awareness of the social and economic burdens imposed by the energy transition was a key part of this imaginary. The document proposed different forms of protective

measures to meet the needs of the most vulnerable. Such apparent concern correlates with the observation that supporters of far-right parties disproportionately include those who are disadvantaged by environmental policies (e.g., those in carbon-intensive industries) and the concomitant rejection of global climate policy as “elitist” (Lockwood 2018, 718; Machin and Wagener 2019). There is also an explicit mention of the importance of public and stakeholder consultation that should take place through online meetings and surveys, although these appear more as “top-down” mechanisms of policy legitimation rather than “bottom-up” initiatives of credible and active participation.

To summarize, the imaginary of the sustainable state found in the Italian documents is one in which the passive state cautiously and reluctantly pursues energy security through technological innovation and stakeholder consultation, with an urgency that is circumscribed by an awareness of the burdens of transitions.

UK and the imaginary of green growth

While in the 1980s analysts frequently referred to the UK as the “Dirty Man of Europe,” by the 2000s the country had become somewhat of a European leader in climate politics (Burns and Carter 2018). Indeed, the UK Climate Change Act of 2008 and the creation of the Committee on Climate Change as a cross-party and independent body were innovations that were widely regarded by political leaders, environmentalists, trade unions, industry, and the media as landmark commitments on climate policy, marking a historical shift (Lockwood 2013). However, the committee has no formal powers and the ambitious targets and rhetoric of the Conservative Party, in government from 2010 until 2024, were belied by its failure to implement effective policy (Carter and Pearson 2022, 169). This was not a matter of low salience; on the contrary, net zero became highly politicized within the Conservative Party (Carter and Pearson 2022, 163), leading to a diagnosis of backlash and “anti-net zero populism” with roots within the party (Paterson et al. 2024). Indeed, the UK government under Prime Minister Rishi Sunak abolished its net zero pledge, in what has been described as a “populist U-turn” (Bloomfield and Steward 2024, 303). Moreover, Brexit has provoked widespread concern that leaving the EU would lead to regulatory gaps, policy retrenchment, and ultimately a fundamental destabilization of UK environmental politics (Burns and Carter 2018).

Against this background, the *Build Back Greener Report*, published in 2021 under the government of then Prime Minister Boris Johnson, promoted a strong and uncompromising imaginary of *green growth*, in which environmental policy is not a brake but a driver for economic growth (Jacobs 2013). In line with this characterization, the document promises a “green industrial revolution...made in Britain” (UK Government 2021, 15). In his foreword to the report, Johnson states that the shift to a sustainable economy will create new industry as well as new “green” jobs (UK Government 2021, 8). This section is followed by a foreword by Kwasi Kwarteng (then Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy) that explicitly states that economic growth and reducing emissions can go hand-in-hand (UK Government 2021, 10). The mutuality (rather than simple compatibility) between economic growth and environmental sustainability is one of the main storylines of ecological modernization, as explained above in relation to Germany. In the *green growth* imaginary, however, environmental sustainability almost entirely disappears behind the “good news” that catastrophic climate change can be avoided (UK Government 2021, 14) and that no sacrifice whatsoever will be needed by consumers (UK Government 2021, 16). Moreover, technological innovation is portrayed as a smooth process in which new technologies appear and costs are reduced, implying that the change will occur automatically; the temporality here is a matter of easy transition that is broken up into “bitesize chunks” (UK Government 2021, 17).

The *Build Back Greener* report was followed two years later by a policy document entitled *UK Net Zero Research Innovation Framework*. This text sets out the scientific and technological challenges foreseen by the government, led by Rishi Sunak at the time, a few months before he notoriously announced a “watering down” of the UK’s net zero policies (Horton 2023). Although this is a more specifically focused document, it nevertheless promotes the same imaginary of a “prosperous and efficient transition to net zero,” of a green growth that will inevitably benefit consumers (UK Government 2023, 6) and of the huge opportunity afforded to industry by a transition to a low-carbon

economy (UK Government 2023, 16). Government support is mentioned as necessary for catalyzing and de-risking private sector investment (UK Government 2023, 9). Again, the role of the state here is simply to guide and invest in the pathways to net zero. Unlike the German imaginary of *ecological modernity*, the main agent in this imaginary is the market.

Both the state *and* the environment move to the very margins of this imaginary, which has at its center technological innovation and market investments. The pictures in the two documents further illustrate this imaginary: of a total of 87 images, 46 are of technology (e.g., wind turbines, electric vehicles), 23 are graphs or diagrams, and 14 are of people (workers with hard hats or laptops). Only four depict non-human nature (Table 3).

Discussion: differences and similarities

The four imaginaries we delineate above have similarities and differences in terms of *who*, *how*, *when*, and *why* of sustainability transformation. The imaginaries offer dissimilar pictures of the main agent of change, the technologies that are used, the time frame for change, and the justifications for it. They also construct and reify the relations between the public, the market, and the state in strikingly different ways. For instance, while in the (German) imaginary of *ecological modernity* and the (Norwegian) imaginary of *environmental stewardship*, the state plays an active role as either a coordinator or partner, in the Italian imaginary of *energy security* and the British imaginary of *green growth*, the state is far more passive. This is a key difference between the German and British imaginaries that both emphasize the importance of leadership and both promote the role of market mechanisms. In the German imaginary, the market demands support from the state. In the British imaginary, in contrast, the market works automatically, in line with the neoliberal ideas of economic rationality and free markets (Hatzisavvidou 2020). Although we don't have space to discuss it here, the different roles allocated to the state presumably have implications for the negotiations around sustainability at the global level.

However, there are some striking similarities across all of the imaginaries. First, they all promote technological innovation and market mechanisms over more radical cultural change. Indeed, three of the imaginaries offer a picture in which social transformations can be ushered in smoothly without any ramifications on employment opportunities or regulations around building, agriculture, and transportation. Perhaps unsurprisingly, imaginaries of *ecological modernization*, *environmental stewardship*, and *green growth* proffer an image of cohesion and consensus in which energy is secure, growth is ongoing, stakeholders agree on the stakes, and consumers continue to consume.

Second, and relatedly, no conflict between the different actors appears in these three imaginaries and can therefore be accused of removing the politics from sustainability transformation. These imaginaries offer a depoliticized picture of the processes of policymaking, matching the depoliticizing tendencies of accusations have been made about the political imaginary of the European Green Deal (Machin 2025). We suggest that these imaginaries preclude any possibility of democratic discussion and fail to engage with the inevitable disagreements, challenges, and exclusions posed by sustainability

Table 3. Dominant imaginaries of four European states.

Country	Imaginary	Agency (Who?)	Technology (How?)	Temporality (When?)	Rationality (Why?)
Germany	Ecological Modernity	Active state "Vater Staat"	A diverse range of technologies needed: digitalization, CCS, hydrogen, renewable energy mix	Deferred innovation	Environmental protection and economic growth are reinforcing
Norway	Environmental Stewardship	"Everyone": the state is a partner with society	Expert knowledge	Transition is already occurring	The Norwegian way of life must be protected
Italy	Energy Security	Passive state	Research and consultation, diversification of technologies, including nuclear power	Urgent, but realistic, orderly, and cautious transition	Opportunity for Italy to reduce energy dependencies
UK	Green Growth	Markets: the role of the state is to invest and "de-risk"	Market mechanisms and government investment	Step-by-step transition	Britain can lead the way toward a "green industrial revolution"

transition (Ruser 2023). This veiling of political conflicts implies that, ultimately, these imaginaries will deviate from the unfolding everyday realities, socioeconomic struggles, and democratic debates of a transforming world.

The imaginary of *energy security* that we find in Italy, however, proves to be an exception in that it includes the environmental and social risks that a green transition might pose and allows space for disagreement and conflicts (albeit only for present generations—the conflicting interests of future generations and nonhuman nature are not included). And yet in this imaginary, the state takes a back-seat role in environmental and climate politics. This leads us to ponder the question of whether acknowledgement of the difficulties of transition always correlates with a lack of aspiration for leadership to drive the sustainability transition. Is awareness of the difficulties and disagreements of social change and ambition in environmental policymaking mutually exclusive?

Finally, a third similarity is the exclusion of other types of knowledge. All four imaginaries neglect the role of indigenous, local, or “lay” knowledges that potentially offer a different account of what constitutes a legitimate, just, and effective transformation (Hatzisavvidou 2024; Thompson and Ban 2022). Although Norway acknowledges its indigenous Sámi people, there is no substantive reference to, or engagement with, their knowledge and experience of socioecological challenges and sustainability policies. This is a concern that invites further discussion.

Conclusion: imaginaries beyond?

Transformation is underpinned by the background understandings that delineate what is possible and what is not. Our analysis has explored and interrogated some of these different background understandings by identifying, comparing, and categorizing the dominant political imaginaries of the sustainable state. We have found four quite distinct imaginaries—of *ecological modernity*, *environmental stewardship*, *energy security*, and *green growth*—that feature within authoritative texts and that reflect and reinforce powerful normative assumptions.

These imaginaries have implications for environmental politics and for the populations of Germany, Norway, Italy, and the UK—and many others around the world who are impacted by the decisions made by these states. We do not claim that the boundaries of these imaginaries correspond exactly to the four states, that they are widespread throughout society, or that they are fixed in place. There will be shifts, especially when new governments come into power with distinct ideas, agendas, and commitments or when challenges such as international conflicts emerge. Alternative imaginaries circulate, resonate, and stick, within and beyond, these four countries.

If, as we have suggested, the dominant imaginaries that we have identified do not offer any prospect of radical transformation, then those demanding substantive change might well call for the building of new imaginaries that can offer alternatives, counter the status quo, and mobilize citizens. The struggle between political imaginaries can be seen as inevitable in the ongoing attempts at closure of the social order. We argue that a significant part of any chance for real transformation is located in this struggle over the political imagination.

Notes




1. The German document does not contain any images.
2. Our initial coding scheme used the following categories: role of the state, inclusivity, climate change, level of urgency, tools and technology, and tone.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

ORCID

Amanda Machin  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3426-7630>

Gloria Ziglioli  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7517-9795>
 Fabio Schojan  <http://orcid.org/0009-0009-7005-5991>
 Alexander Ruser  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5688-2589>

References

- Adams, S., J. Smith, and I. Straume. 2012. "Political Imaginaries in Question." *Critical Horizons* 13 (1): 5–11. doi:10.1558/crit.v13i1.5.
- Adams, S., P. Blokker, N. Doyle, J. Krummel, and J. Smith. 2015. "Social Imaginaries in Debate." *Social Imaginaries* 1 (1): 15–52. doi:10.5840/si2015112.
- Arruda, A. 2015. "Image, Social Imaginary and Social Representations." In *The Cambridge Handbook of Social Representations*, edited by G. Sammut, E. Andreouli, G. Gaskell, and J. Valsiner, 128–142. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bang, G., and B. Lahn. 2020. "From Oil as Welfare to Oil as Risk? Norwegian Petroleum Resource Governance and Climate Policy." *Climate Policy* 20 (8): 997–1009. doi:10.1080/14693062.2019.1692774.
- Barry, J., and R. Eckersley. 2005. "An Introduction to Reinstating the State." In *The State and the Global Ecological Crisis*, edited by J. Barry and R. Eckersley, ix–xxv. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. doi:10.7551/mitpress/6439.001.0001.
- Barry, J., and K. Smith. 2008. "Landscape, Politics, Labour and Identity: Stewardship and the Contribution of Green Political Theory." *Landscape Research* 33 (5): 565–585. doi:10.1080/01426390802323781.
- Bloomfield Jon. Steward Fred. The New Transition Politics of Net Zero. *The Political Quarterly*. 2024. 95 (2) 298–307. Apr 2024. doi:10.1111/1467-923X.13380.
- Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Energie (BMWK). 2023. Klimaschutzprogramm der Bundesregierung (The Federal Government's Climate Protection Program). Berlin: BMWK. <https://www.bmwk.de/Redaktion/DE/Downloads/klimaschutz/20231004-klimaschutzprogramm-der-bundesregierung.pdf>
- Bornemann, B., C. Marius, and P. Burger. 2025. "The Sustainable State: A Meta-Governance Framework." *Environmental Politics* 34 (2): 344–366. doi:10.1080/09644016.2024.2369015.
- Browne, C., and P. Diehl. 2019. "Conceptualising the Political Imaginary: An Introduction to the Special Issue." *Social Epistemology* 33 (5): 393–397. doi:10.1080/02691728.2019.1652859.
- Burns, C., and N. Carter. 2018. "Brexit and UK Environmental Policy and Politics." *French Journal of British Studies* 23 (3) doi:10.4000/rfcb.2385.
- Campolongo, F., G. Citroni, and V. Tarditi. 2024. "What, When, How? The Framing of Energy Transition by Italian Parties." *Italian Political Science* 18 (3): 211–232. doi:10.69101/IPS.2023.18.3.3.
- Carter, N., and M. Pearson. 2022. "From Green Crap to Net Zero: Conservative Climate Policy 2015–2022." *British Politics* 19 (1): 1–21. doi:10.1057/s41293-022-00222-x.
- Catanzaro, M. 2023. "Italian Nuclear Industry Revival on the Table." *Nature*, September 11. <https://www.nature.com/articles/d43978-023-00130-8>
- Castoriadis, C. 1993. "The Greek and the Modern Political Imaginary." *Salmagundi* 100: 102–129.
- Castoriadis, C. 1987. *The Imaginary Institution of Society*. Translated by K. Blamey. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Death, C. 2022. "Climate Fiction, Climate Theory: Decolonising Imaginations of Global Futures." *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 50 (2): 430–455. doi:10.1177/0305829821106392.
- Di Nucci, M. 2006. "The Nuclear Power Option in the Italian Energy Policy." *Energy & Environment* 17 (3): 341–357. doi:10.1260/095830506778119353.
- Diehl, P. 2019. "Temporality and the Political Imaginary in the Dynamics of Political Representation." *Social Epistemology* 33 (5): 410–421. doi:10.1080/02691728.2019.1652865.
- Dryzek, J., C. Hunold, D. Schlosberg, D. Downes, and J.-K. Hernes. 2002. "Environmental Transformation of the State: The USA, Norway, Germany and the UK." *Political Studies* 50 (4): 659–682. doi:10.1111/1467-9248.00001.
- Dubash, N. 2021. "Varieties of Climate Governance: The Emergence and Functioning of Climate Institutions." *Environmental Politics* 30 (Supp 1): 1–25. doi:10.1080/09644016.2021.1979775.
- Duit, A., P. Feindt, and J. Meadowcroft. 2016. "Greening Leviathan: The Rise of the Environmental State?" *Environmental Politics* 25 (1): 1–23. doi:10.1080/09644016.2015.1085218.
- Eckersley, R. 2004. *The Green State: Rethinking Democracy and Sovereignty*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. doi:10.7551/mitpress/3364.001.0001.
- Fairclough, N. 2013. "Critical Discourse Analysis." In *The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, edited by J. Gee and M. Handford, 9–20. London: Routledge. doi:10.4324/9780203809068.
- Fasting, M., and Ø. Sørensen. 2021. *The Norwegian Exception? Norway's Liberal Democracy Since 1814*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ghinoi, S., and B. Steiner. 2020. "The Political Debate on Climate Change in Italy: A Discourse Network Analysis." *Politics and Governance* 8 (2): 215–228. doi:10.17645/pag.v8i2.2577.
- Haas, T. 2021. "From Green Energy to the Green Car State? The Political Economy of Ecological Modernisation in Germany." *New Political Economy* 26 (4): 660–673. doi:10.1080/13563467.2020.1816949.

- Hammond, M. 2021. "Imagination and Critique in Environmental Politics." *Environmental Politics* 30 (1–2): 285–305. doi:10.1080/09644016.2021.1880062.
- Hansen, S., and E. Moe. 2022. "Renewable Energy Expansion or the Preservation of National Energy Sovereignty? Norwegian Renewable Energy Policy Meets Resource Nationalism." *Political Geography* 99: 102760. doi:10.1016/j.polgeo.2022.102760.
- Hatzisavvidou, S. 2024. "Envisioning Ecopolitical Futures: Reading Climate Fiction as Political Theory." *Futures* 163: 103456. doi:10.1016/j.futures.2024.103456.
- Hatzisavvidou, S. 2020. "Inventing the Environmental State: Neoliberal Common Sense and the Limits to Transformation." *Environmental Politics* 29 (1): 96–114. doi:10.1080/09644016.2019.1684732.
- Hausknot, D., and M. Hammond. 2020. "Beyond the Environmental State? The Political Prospects of a Sustainability Transformation." *Environmental Politics* 29 (1): 1–16. doi:10.1080/09644016.2020.1686204.
- Horton, H. 2023. "UK Net Zero Policies: What Has Sunak Scrapped and What Do Changes Mean?" *The Guardian*, September 20. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/sep/20/uk-net-zero-policies-scrapped-what-do-changes-mean>
- Jacobs, M. 2013. "Green Growth." In *The Handbook of Global Climate and Environment Policy*, edited by R. Falkner, 197–214. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Jänicke, M. 1992. "Conditions for Environmental Policy Success: An International Comparison." *The Environmentalist* 12 (1): 47–58. doi:10.1007/BF01267594.
- Jänicke, M., and H. Jörgens. 2023. "Ecological Modernization and Beyond." In *Routledge Handbook of Environmental Policy*, edited by H. Jörgens, C. Knill and Y. Steinebach, 68–87. London: Routledge. doi:10.4324/9781003043843.
- Jasanoff, S. 2015. "Imagined and Invented Worlds." In *Dreamscapes of Modernity: Sociotechnical Imaginaries and the Fabrication of Power*, edited by S. Jasanoff and S.-H. Kim, 321–341. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Jessop, B. 2012. "Economic and Ecological Crises: Green New Deals and No-Growth Economies." *Development* 55 (1): 17–24. doi:10.1057/dev.2011.104.
- Johnstone, P., and P. Newell. 2018. "Sustainability Transitions and the State." *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions* 27: 72–82. doi:10.1016/j.eist.2017.10.006.
- Keskinen, S., U. Skaptadóttir, and M. Toivanen. 2019. "Narrations of Homogeneity, Waning Welfare States, and the Politics of Solidarity." In *Undoing Homogeneity in the Nordic Region: Migration, Difference, and the Politics of Solidarity*, edited by S. Keskinen, U. Skaptadóttir, and M. Toivanen, 1–17. London: Routledge.
- Klüh, N., V. Selk, and M. Knodt. 2024. "Navigating the Transition: Unraveling the EU's Different Imaginaries for a Just Future." *Futures* 164: 103483. doi:10.1016/j.futures.2024.103483.
- Knill, C., and A. Lenschow. 1998. "Coping with Europe: The Impact of British and German Administrations on the Implementation of EU Environmental Policy." *Journal of European Public Policy* 5 (4): 595–614. doi:10.1080/13501769880000041.
- Krüger, T. 2022. "The German Energy Transition and the Eroding Consensus on Ecological Modernization: A Radical Democratic Perspective on Conflicts Over Competing Justice Claims and Energy Visions." *Futures* 136: 102899. doi:10.1016/j.futures.2021.1028.
- Kuokkanen, R. 2023. "Are Reindeer the New Buffalo? Climate Change, the Green Shift, and Manifest Destiny in Sápmi." *Meridians* 22 (1): 11–33. doi:10.1215/15366936-10220458.
- Italian Government. 2024. *Piano Nazionale Integrato Energia e Clima (National Integrated Energy and Climate Plan)*. Rome: Italian Government. https://www.mase.gov.it/sites/default/files/PNIEC_2024_revfin_01072024%20errata%20corrigere%20pulito.pdf
- Leach, M., I. Scoones, and A. Stirling. 2010. *Dynamic Sustainabilities: Technology, Environment, Social Justice*. London: Earthscan.
- Levy, D., and A. Spicer. 2013. "Contested Imaginaries and the Cultural Political Economy of Climate Change." *Organization* 20 (5): 659–678. doi:10.1177/13505084134898.
- Lockwood, M. 2013. "The Political Sustainability of Climate Policy: The Case of the UK Climate Change Act." *Global Environmental Change* 23 (5): 1339–1348. doi:10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2013.07.001.
- Lockwood, M. 2018. "Right-Wing Populism and the Climate Change Agenda: Exploring the Linkages." *Environmental Politics* 27 (4): 712–732. doi:10.1080/09644016.2018.1458411.
- Machin, A. 2025. "The European Green Deal and the Democratic Imagination." *Journal of European Integration* 47 (2): 155–171. doi:10.1080/07036337.2025.2455686.
- Machin, A. 2022a. "Climate Democracy: Sceptical, Rational and Radical Imaginaries. Advanced Review." *WIREs Climate Change* 13 (4): e774. doi:10.1002/wcc.774.
- Machin, A. 2022b. "Green Democracy: Political Imaginaries of Environmental Movements." In *The Routledge Handbook of Environmental Movements*, edited by M. Giugni and M. Grasso, 552–563. London: Routledge.
- Machin, A. 2019. "Changing the Story? The Trajectory of the Ecological Modernisation Discourse in the European Union." *Environmental Politics* 28 (2): 208–227. doi:10.1080/09644016.2019.1549780.
- Machin, A., and A. Ruser. 2019. "Nationalising the Climate: Is the Far Right Turning Green?" *Green European Journal*, September 27. <http://www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu/nationalising-the-climate-is-the-european-far-right-turning-green>
- Machin, A., and O. Wagener. 2019. "The Nature of Green Populism." *Green European Journal*, February 22. <http://www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu/the-nature-of-green-populism>

- Machin, D., and A. Mayr. 2013. "Personalising Crime and Crime-Fighting in Factual Television: An Analysis of Social Actors and Transitivity in Language and Images." *Critical Discourse Studies* 10 (4): 356–372. doi:10.1080/17405904.2013.813771.
- Mazzucato, M. 2015. "The Green Entrepreneurial State." In *The Politics of Green Transformation*, edited by I. Scoone, M. Leach, and P. Newell, 134–152. London: Routledge.
- Meadowcroft, J. 2005. "From Welfare State to Ecostate." In *The State and the Global Ecological Crisis*, edited by J. Barry and R. Eckersley, 3–23. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Milkoreit, M. 2017. "Imaginary Politics: Climate Change and Making the Future." *Elementa: Science of the Anthropocene* 5: 62. doi:10.1525/elementa.249.
- Miller, T. 2020. "Imaginariness of Sustainability: The Techno-Politics of Smart Cities." *Science as Culture* 29 (3): 365–387. doi:10.1080/09505431.2019.1705273.
- Murphy, M. 2021. "A New Welfare Imaginary for the Island of Ireland." *Irish Studies in International Affairs* 32 (2): 532–557. doi:10.1353/isia.2021.0063.
- Norwegian Ministry of Climate and the Environment. 2022. "Norway's Climate Action Plan for 2021–2030. Oslo: Norwegian Ministry of Climate and Environment. <https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/a78ecf5ad2344fa5ae4a394412ef8975/en-gb/pdfs/stm202020210013000engpdfs.pdf>
- Norwegian Ministry of Climate and the Environment. 2023. "Klima i Endring – Sammen for et Klimarobust Samfunn, Meld.St. 26 (Climate Change – Together for a Climate-Resilient Society, Report No. 26). Oslo: Norwegian Ministry of Climate and Environment. <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/meld.-st.-26-20222023/id2985027/>
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). 2023. *Environmental Performance Reviews: Germany*. Paris: OECD.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). 2022a. *Environmental Performance Reviews: Norway*. Paris: OECD.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). 2022b. *Environmental Performance Reviews: United Kingdom*. Paris: OECD.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). 2013. *Environmental Performance Reviews: Italy*. Paris: OECD.
- Paterson, M., S. Wilshire, and P. Tobin. 2024. "The Rise of Anti-Net Zero Populism in the UK: Comparing Rhetorical Strategies for Climate Policy Dismantling." *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice* 26 (3-4): 332–350. doi:10.1080/13876988.2023.2242799.
- Pigott, A. 2018. "Imagining Socioecological Transformation: An Analysis of the Welsh Government's Policy Innovations and Orientations to the Future." *Elementa: Science of the Anthropocene* 6: 60. doi:10.1525/elementa.315.
- Prontera, A. 2021. "The Dismantling of Renewable Energy Policy in Italy." *Environmental Politics* 30 (7): 1196–1216. doi:10.1080/09644016.2020.1868837.
- Rudek, T. 2022. "Capturing the Invisible. Sociotechnical Imaginaries of Energy: The Critical Overview." *Science and Public Policy* 49 (2): 219–245. doi:10.1093/scipol/scab076.
- Ruser, A. 2023. "Undeserving and Dangerous: The Construction of Outsiders and the Return of the Third Way in Green Welfare State Debates." *Politiche Sociali, Social Policies* 1: 63–80. doi:10.7389/107139.
- Schimank, U. 2009. "'Vater Staat': ein Vorhersehbares Comeback. Staatsverständnis und Staatstätigkeit in der Moderne" ('Father State': A Predictable Comeback. The Understanding of the State and State Activity in the Modern Age). *dms – der moderne staat – Zeitschrift für Public Policy, Recht und Management* 2 (2): 249–269. <https://www.budrich-journals.de/index.php/dms/article/viewFile/2879/2414>. doi:10.3224/dms.v2i2.01.
- Schojan, F., A. Machin, and M. Silberberger. 2024. "Sustainable Development Discourse and Development Aid in Germany: Tracking the Changes." *Critical Policy Studies* 18 (3): 446–469. doi:10.1080/19460171.2023.2265988.
- Schreurs, M. 2016. "Is Germany Really an Environmental Leader?" *Current History* 115 (779): 114–116. doi:10.1525/curh.2016.115.779.114.
- Steinberg, P., J. Tasch, and H. Gerhardt. 2015. *Contesting the Arctic: Politics and Imaginaries in the Circumpolar North*. New York: I.B. Tauris.
- Streeck, W. 1999. *Korporatismus in Deutschland: zwischen Nationalstaat und Europäischer Union (Corporatism in Germany: Between Nation-State and European Union)*. Frankfurt/Main: Campus-Verlag.
- Taylor, C. 2004. *Modern Social Imaginaries*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Tobin, P., N. Schmidt, J. Tosun, and C. Burns. 2018. "Mapping States' Paris Climate Pledges: Analysing Targets and Groups at COP 21." *Global Environmental Change* 48: 11–21. doi:10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2017.11.002.
- Tobin, P., and L. Wylie. 2021. "National Climate Mitigation Policy in Europe." In *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Environmental Politics*, edited by J. Sowers, S. Vandeveer, and E. Weinthal, 93–108. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Thompson, K.-L., and N. Ban. 2022. "'Turning to the Territory': A Gitga'at Nation Case Study of Indigenous Climate Imaginaries and Actions." *Geoforum* 137: 230–236. doi:10.1016/j.geoforum.2021.11.006.
- Tozer, L., and N. Klenk. 2018. "Discourses of Carbon Neutrality and Imaginaries of Urban Futures." *Energy Research & Social Science* 35: 174–181. doi:10.1016/j.erss.2017.10.017.

- UK Government. 2021. *Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener*. London: HM Government. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/net-zero-strategy>
- UK Government. 2023. *UK Net Zero Research and Innovation Framework*. London: HM Government. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-net-zero-research-and-innovation-framework-delivery-plan-2022-to-2025>
- United Nations. 2015. *Paris Agreement*. New York: United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english_paris_agreement.pdf
- van Dijk, T. 2015. "Critical Discourse Analysis." In *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, Second Ed., edited by D. Tannen, H. Hamilton, and D. Schiffrin, 466–485. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Wodak, R. 1999. "Critical Discourse Analysis at the End of the 20th Century." *Research on Language & Social Interaction* 32 (1): 185–193. doi:10.1080/08351813.1999.9683622.
- Wodak, R. 2014. "Critical Discourse Analysis." In *The Routledge Companion to English Studies*, edited by C. Leung and B. Street, 302–316. London: Routledge.
- Yusoff, K., and J. Gabrys. 2011. "Climate Change and the Imagination." *WIREs Climate Change* 2 (4): 516–534. doi:10.1002/wcc.117.