

Leeds University Business School – Research and Innovation Podcast

Episode: Just Transitions – a global exploration: Germany

Speakers: Vera Trappmann and Felix Schulz

[00:00:00] **Vera:** Hello and welcome everyone to the Research and Innovation Podcast. My name is Vera Trappmann and I'm joined today by Felix Schulz, and we are having another episode of our "Just Transition, a global exploration" series, where we talk about the research results of our large comparative project on Just Transition. Hi, Felix.

[00:00:29] **Felix:** Hi Vera. Nice to talk to you.

[00:00:32] **Vera:** Today we wanted to present you results on a survey that we have done in Germany. We have asked workers about their perception of the climate crisis. We have asked them how they see the green economy; if they can think about working in the green economy; if they would be interested in switching into a new job. We have asked them how they look at policy measures that accompany or enable a transition to a greener economy. And yeah, we want to present some of those results.

Felix, what was the most interesting to you from what we found?

[00:01:13] **Felix:** I mean, I think there are too many, too many interesting things - picking out one of them would be very hard because like you said, it wasn't like an academic paper, but it was this very new survey tool, which is very unique to Germany.

So if I had to pick out one thing, I think that's very important in the debates that we're seeing today is how much support there was from workers when it comes to climate change. I mean, the vast majorities of workers in Germany were worried about climate change. They thought that "we already feel major consequences" or "we will see them soon and that we need to address this with extreme urgency".

And I think that's a very important finding, considering all the debates, whether we look at Germany or the UK. We see lots of politicians saying "people don't want to address climate change". So I think that was the one thing that came out of the survey, which was very important, and also that they associate all these important things that make life worthwhile. So they feel like there was going to be more well-being in the greener economy, more health benefits.

So I think these are all very positive findings that came out of it, but - and I think that's a very important but - that somehow brings the government into the whole picture is that a large majority also anticipate that change will come with higher costs, lower standards of living, and more inequality and poverty.

So I think it really puts policymakers on the front scene to say, "listen, people feel that change is necessary, but you need to accompany this transition". That was kind of the major thing for me. What is your key takeaway?

[00:03:03] **Vera:** For me, I think the biggest surprise was how many of the workers were interested in changing jobs in order to work in a green sector. So like 40 percent of workers who are currently not working in a sector that is considered to be green, who said they would like to work there, and

they would like to work in a green sector because they want to contribute something to halt climate breakdown.

So to me, that was the really striking finding that gave me a little bit of hope as well. Considering that we always have the discussions, what are the conditions in the green sectors? Not all of them are as well protected by trade unions as, let's say, traditional manufacturing sectors.

But although they were saying yes, they are of course, interested in good working conditions in a green economy, but those kind of, let's say, non-monetary reasons to work in the green economy were stronger. So it was that they can make contribution and that they think they have a meaningful job would even outweigh a little bit, the kind of level of reward, like financial reward, they get in these jobs.

So to me, that was a really positive takeaway and the other positive thing, which links a little bit, but you were saying that government is really called to take responsibility. So we also asked who do they think is best equipped to address climate change.

And while the workers were doing a lot at the household level, trying to reduce their own carbon footprint, they were aware that it's a systemic issue and that they can try to reduce as much as they want if there is not a more systemic solution, the change won't happen quickly enough. So the vast majority was actually addressing the government to do something to regulate, to invest in renewable energies, to offer the kind of legal framework that will help companies to change quickly.

So for me, that were two really kind of positive outcomes, positive results that make me a little bit hopeful against the background of, in particular, where the media is trying to prevent a constructive dialogue around climate mitigation.

[00:05:37] **Felix:** Can I just add to this, Vera? Because I think this is also shown by the action. So the systemic aspect, we see that 60 percent of workers already do things at home to reduce their carbon footprint. But when we look at how many are actually doing something at the workplace, it's half - it's 30%, which again, makes sense, right?

At home, we have the individual freedom, the autonomy to change what we do as a lifestyle. But when we go to work, we're very dependent on the employer to give us the structures to change things, to actively reduce carbon emissions. So, I think, again, in very different angles, from different angles, our survey showed that most people are willing to do things, but they cannot do it by themselves.

They need both employers who are ready to do things, and they need the state to come in and take action, to kind of guide this transition. And on the first point that you mentioned, which was that it is really the intrinsic motivations that get these people to want to work in these sectors - I think that's very interesting, but on the other hand, I think we see that those who are still a bit more reluctant I think on the one hand there was a fear that they don't have the skills yet, and that acquiring these new skills might take either time or costs, which is an issue. And on the other hand, some were afraid that the pay might not be as good in these sectors. So I think it is a bit of both. These jobs are perceived as interesting, which is amazing.

And now we need to make them also to pay off for these people. And I think this is, again interesting, what we found that where unions come in, that union members and a lot of these aspects were much more positive because union members thought they have the required skills. There was much less about skills for them. So the role that unions can play to have a voice, but also to fight for better working conditions.

[00:07:39] **Vera:** Yeah, that's actually a really interesting aspect. Our project is funded by the Hans Böckler Foundation, which is a think tank in Germany that is really interested in shaping the transition in a just and fair way for workers.

And we've discussed the results with them and it was really such a strong result that trade union members in the sample - and we oversample them a little bit so that we have robust results on this - that the trade union members, they are more concerned, but they also feel that they have more agency to change things. So they were more involved at the workplace. They have received more training about climates. They have been involved in kind of decision making around decarbonization at their companies.

So that was a really good result in terms of understanding that in a democratic institution like trade unions where you involve workers, actually shows a lot of positive results and if it comes to such big societal transformations that we have ahead of us.

Was there anything that took you completely by surprise, Felix?

[00:08:58] **Felix:** I think not by surprise, but still something that that came through is the uncertainty for many. So if we look at how... we had a lot of questions, I think this was the main reasons also why we did the survey, because we really wanted to know how people perceive changes to their jobs, and their work livelihoods, because in Germany there are surveys. There's the big survey called the Umweltbewusstseinsstudie, which translates into environmental awareness study, which has been going on since 1996.

And they ask about people's general perception of environmental issues. But what has been missing really, and I think this is where our survey also tapped into a very important gap, was how people perceive jobs and work will change. And what we found out is when we ask these specific questions - "what do you think will happen in your sector? What do you think will happen to jobs in your community? And what do you think will happen to your own job?" - we saw that a lot of people, I think around a third on average, were unsure. They were not sure whether it's going to lead to job losses or to gains in jobs. And I think that's something that is very important and something where the politicians need to tap into, that people haven't been decided. They don't know yet.

We need to include them more in these debates and there's still a chance to really design and develop this transformation in a social and ecological way, and I did not expect... Of course, you and I, we are researching this. This is a topic we deal with on an everyday basis. And of course, I think sometimes we take for granted that everybody must think about this issue the way that we do and seeing how unsure many people in Germany, many workers in Germany still are, was in a way, eye opening to me and shows that we need to do more as academics, but also politicians need to do more to put this on the centre stage.

[00:11:06] **Vera:** Yeah, I agree. And I mean, the results are so interesting, but something, and therefore I'm glad we can also do this podcast, but I think we need to do much more in terms of how

we communicate this and how communication - a good communication - is needed to ensure that policy measures are accepted by workers in the population.

So we've seen in Germany, just the failure, trying to introduce heat pumps and abolish gas boilers that almost... it was a really radical political suggestion, which is needed in order to halt climate breakdown. But it was communicated so badly by politics that it got watered down completely.

And I think with our survey, we see that there are certain fragments within workers, who are really already on board, and others who are not. And they do need different kind of communication content, different ways of communicating. So I think that's really important that we as academics can play our part there.

And something that I found really interesting - we did this study also in the UK, so we have the comparison to the results and the differences between German and UK workers - and to me, that was interesting that Germans seem to be a bit more concerned about climate breakdown and they do expect more from the companies.

So I think with the tradition of social partnership in Germany, they do expect that companies will play their part and will do it in dialogue with workers. Felix, is there anything that, that you were particularly surprised with or think is interesting comparing the two?

[00:12:58] **Felix:** I mean, there was a lot of similarities, which I think is again, also important to highlight.

These are countries which are institutionally very different. As you highlighted - in Germany, labour unions are very well integrated systemically, while in the UK, they're much more fragmented. Less powerful workers have different rights and still we see similarities on the care for climate change for fighting it. So that was interesting.

Which came through was that I think there's more discussions. Among German workers in the workplace, so climate change is discussed more, which again might be, as you highlighted, we see companies and employers in Germany to need to take a more active role. And maybe then this also trickles down to the employees or the other way around. Maybe employees are the one from the bottom up driving it.

So that's, I think something for, for future research to look into. But I think this was interesting for me as well to see when comparing these two countries.

[00:13:58] **Vera:** Yeah, you mentioned future research, so the good thing is that we are intending to replicate this study both in Germany next year, to see some kind of development over time, but also in other countries.

So we will also conduct this research in four or five more countries, and then have a much better kind of basis for comparing and understanding this in context.

And we have just been awarded with a Competence Centre on social ecological transformation. So we have funding for the next three years at least to do more research in this space. And one part will be more surveys on this topic in other countries.

Yeah, so please keep in touch to learn more about workers attitudes towards climate change. Our details are in the episode show notes. Thanks for listening and have a good rest of your day.

[00:15:00] **Felix:** Take care. Bye bye.