



IHDP Open Meeting 2009

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Human Dimensions of
Global Environmental Change

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World Conference Center Bonn
UN Campus
Bonn, Germany

The Social Challenges of Global Change

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Time: Wednesday 29 April 14:00 - 15:30

Change is Hard: The Challenges of Path Dependence in Addressing Global Change

Organised by: Arizona State University

Convenor: Abigail York and Jameson Wetmore

Panelists: Michelle Hegmon, Bob Bolin, Christopher Boone, Sander van der Leeuw, Arne Peterman

Venue: World Conference Center Bonn, Room C

Path dependence describes a situation in which initial conditions establish a trajectory, making changes or reversal increasingly difficult. Although path dependence is often perceived as having negative consequences, it can also contribute to helpful trajectories. Research on path dependence is critical for understanding how institutions can be adapted to address global change, both in the sense of understanding why change is so difficult in some situations-and what can be done about it-and understanding how negative trajectories can be avoided. Path dependence has been studied primarily in economics, political science, and science and technology studies. The research presented in this session extends the concept into new transdisciplinary realms using spatial theory, mathematical modeling, archaeology, and institutional analysis. Together the papers consider how and why path dependence developed (or did not develop) in various situations and provide insights on the possibilities for institutional change.