

Intergenerational Climate Justice and Basic Needs

FWF Standalone Project P 33169-G

Wider research context / theoretical framework

Climate change is plausibly regarded as a problem of intergenerational justice. The most pressing question of intergenerational climate justice concerns the present generation's relation to future generations. Do we owe future generations to adopt additional measures against climate change and its harmful consequences? And if yes, to what extent and in which way? Scholars have addressed this question from the perspectives of various principles of intergenerational justice. There is one plausible principle that has so far been widely neglected, though. According to this principle, the present generation ought to enable future generations to meet their basic needs — for example, their needs for water, food and health.

Hypotheses/research questions /objectives

The aim of our project is to contribute to assessing states' climate-related intergenerational duties of justice from the perspective of this particular principle.

Approach/methods

First, we develop a clear, plausible and workable version of the principle (which involves defining the concept of basic needs, determining the actual basic needs and basic needs satisfiers of present and future generations, and examining the social discounting of future basic needs and the moral implications of scarcity). And second, we investigate which scientific models and studies would be necessary for this principle to be able to provide concrete and realistic ethical guidance with regard to climate change (which involves identifying climate change measures that are feasible or soon-to-be feasible, investigating how to best model the effects of business as usual and these measures on future generations' ability to meet their basic needs, and examining how to assess the empirical assumptions of arguments for discounting and from scarcity).

Level of originality / innovation

Along with few other publications, this project contains one of the first serious attempts to establish basic needs as the currency of a general principle of intergenerational (climate) justice. It will importantly contribute to a better understanding and operationalization of basic needs in normative contexts, to assessing the plausibility of sufficientarianism, to informing scientific models and studies with regard to climate change, to discussions about social discounting, and so on.

Primary researchers involved

The project is led by Lukas Meyer, Professor of Practical Philosophy at the University of Graz, who is one of the leading experts in the field of climate justice. It includes the funding of a post-doc position for Thomas Pözlner, a University Assistant (Researcher and Lecturer) at the Philosophy Department of the University of Graz, as well as for a doctoral student and a student assistant.