

## **Abstract für Momentum 2024: Alternativen**

### **Delaying Action on Climate**

#### **The Use of Discursive Power by the Austrian Social partners**

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Dieser Beitrag basiert auf einem Artikel, der als Gruppenabgabe für den Kurs "Globalization and Multi-level Policy" an der WU Wien auf Englisch verfasst wurde. Diese Arbeit wurde von Dr. Andreas Novy betreut. Eine Präsentation auf Deutsch ist aber möglich.

#### **Abstract**

Austria is a corporatist country, meaning that the four big social partners (the Chamber of Labor (AK), Economic Chamber (WKO), Chamber of Agriculture (LK), and Austrian Trade Union Federation (ÖGB)) are an essential element of Austrian politics. These four social partners have a crucial influence on all areas of policy, including climate policy. To identify how they try to influence public discourse on the climate, we conducted a discourse analysis of their press releases from 2023. We employed a largely deductive framework analysis, building on the discourses of climate delay described by Lamb et al. (2020), to identify types of discourse used by each social partner that delay climate action.

Indeed, the social partners have several avenues of influence on political decision-making, including informing and participating in political discussions and participating in the implementation of policy. Much of how the social partners employ their power is not public, meaning that past research has largely been informed by interviews. Though, the social partners also have a very public presence, so we focus on the way they use their influence to affect public discourse by looking at their press releases. Our analysis builds on Lukes' (2004) conceptualization of power, which includes the influence of discourse on desires and preferences to secure hegemony.

The existing literature has identified that the social partners "have repeatedly weakened, delayed, or entirely prevented progress in climate policy" (Steurer et al., 2023, p. 389, own translation) and contributed to an overall lack of climate action in Austria. Our analysis shows that especially the WKO and LK, but also the AK and, to a lesser extent, the ÖGB pursue narratives that cause delays of transformative climate policy. The specific discourses used by the social partners differ significantly, but the social partners use these discourses mostly to advocate for the economic interests of their respective target groups.

We find that communications by the social partners include examples of all four main categories of discourse of climate delay described by Lamb et al. (2020): surrender, redirect responsibility, push non-transformative solutions, and emphasize the downsides. We

identified examples of narratives that fit these main categories but also defined new sub-categories not included in the framework. We define additional discourses pushing non-transformative solutions: free-market optimism, market-based incentive solutionism, biomass/biogas solutionism, and animal-based agriculture solutionism, as well as additional discourses emphasizing the downsides of climate policy: claim ineffectiveness, appeal to tradition, and appeal to maintaining competitiveness.

Although this analysis cannot identify to what extent each discourse of climate delay may be (un)justified in each case, it corroborates the previous literature assigning responsibility for the delay of climate policy in Austria to the social partners, especially the WKO. We conclude that a reform of the corporatist system could be useful to reduce structural barriers to climate action.

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