

PUTTING A HALT TO CLIMATE CHANGE

TIM FREYTAG
INTERNAL SENIOR FELLOW
INTERDISCIPLINARY
RESEARCH GROUPS



People of the 21st century are faced with very few developments as challenging as climate change. For a long time academics regarded global warming as an issue for the scientific community. However, it has now become clear to many that putting a stop to this alarming environmental change is predominantly a task requiring political and social changes. The cultural geographer Tim Freytag hopes to find out how to succeed in this Herculean task through the interdisciplinary research project "Mobility, Climate Change and Governance", which he has been leading at FRIAS since autumn 2011. He is supported by four colleagues who have already successfully researched individual aspects of this problem: human ecologist and tourism researcher Stefan Gössling, political scientist Annica Kronsell from Sweden, marketing expert Michael Hall and sociologist John Urry from Great Britain, who were all brave enough to tackle this broad and complex interdisciplinary topic. Tim Freytag sets great store by the fact that his guest academics not only work exceptionally well together with him at FRIAS but also with their colleagues in the Faculty of Forest and Environ-

mental Sciences. "Our research topic has a direct link with the work carried out in this faculty and synergy is very welcome. It increases Freiburg's standing as a research location."

Freytag and the majority of other experts believe that limiting the amount of global warming which takes place between now and 2050 to a maximum of two degrees is the most pressing task in the fight against climate change. To achieve this, greenhouse gas emissions would need to be reduced by 50% by 2050. "This is unlikely to be achieved through political decisions alone and instead requires humanity as a whole to change its way of living," states Freytag. Looking at the topic of "Mobility" is the most important starting point. "We have to focus on this important field if we want to bring about positive changes," says the cultural geographer. Even if the automotive industry introduces remarkable technical developments, the amount of carbon dioxide emissions will rise further in the coming years as a result of the increasing volume of traffic on our streets. However, Freytag cherishes a hope that people will rethink the way they

travel in their private lives, i.e. during their free time, on their way to work, on holiday and when shopping. "We have to create positive incentives and promote rethinking in the area of mobility without making people feel that doing so involves making sacrifices," explains the Internal Senior Fellow. He believes, for example, that car sharing could be made a lot more attractive and that starting car pools could even be made more lucrative. Towns and communities could follow the example set by the Danish capital Copenhagen of better supporting bikes as a mode of transport. Tim Freytag is convinced that "such changes can only be brought about from 'below' and that regulations on these matters from 'above' do not work." He also feels that even Freiburg has the potential to make cycling more attractive than it already is. Planners could adjust traffic light controls to match the speed at which bikes travel and cycle parking possibilities could be improved. In short, the district council could make the entire city suitable for bike riders. "The city should introduce a suitable framework, which can then be put into action by the numerous initiatives already up and running in Freiburg," recommends the FRIAS Fellow. He is convinced that the global problem of climate change is most likely to be solved at a local level, and believes that we need to start off by looking at the lifestyles adopted in different places. This will allow us to find tailor-made mobility solutions to prompt actual changes. "Mobility patterns highlight a person's position in society and are an expression of their personality. Concentrating on a district level unites the topic of mobility and the task

of developing cities sustainably. The question of social sustainability also plays a role here," explains Freytag. The researchers have spent the past months searching for case studies from around the world which will soon be published in a book.

When looking at the topic of mobility and how it influences climate change, it is also worthwhile studying people's current travel habits from an academic point of view. For those living in developed countries, travelling traditionally represents going somewhere totally different from home and evokes images of paradise islands. This trend, however, is in the process of changing: "The internet and mobile phones mean that we can no longer escape our daily lives while on holiday and the two worlds are becoming mixed," claims Tim Freytag. He considers an indicator of this to be the increasing popularity of city breaks, which instead of offering peace and relaxation open up a wide range of possibilities. Freytag adds that since traffic, in particular bus and train routes, already flows into cities, this change provides the potential for making travel more eco-friendly. "However, it is not only mobility which plays a role here but accommodation as well," states Freytag. Travelling to nearby places is becoming increasingly more popular than holidays to faraway destinations. Some people are asking themselves, "Why fly to Paris, London or Barcelona when I can spend the perfect weekend in the Black Forest?" Freytag is convinced that boosting this trend will primarily be a question of marketing. As underlined by Tim Freytag, his team has only been able to consider

all these points thanks to the special funding format established for the interdisciplinary research groups. "It allowed us to be as flexible as possible when opening up our enormously broad interdisciplinary research field." After ten months of hard work this is now clearly structured. Together with their colleagues in the faculty, the team has produced several publications and has also drawn up concrete proposals for future projects. (kb)

