

**Standards, Governance, and Global Transformations Conference 2026**  
**January 29—30, 2026, at Goethe University Frankfurt**  
hosted by the DFG Research Training Group ‘Standards of Governance’

Standards, governance, and global transformations in an era of rapid digital transformation, interrelated global crises, and demands for sustainable practices, standards have become central tools of governance endorsed by policy actors to shape various societal processes such as the socio-ecological transformation. While allegedly providing consensus-based optimal solutions, standards are also emerging in politicized codification procedures that are interest-driven, contested and sometimes even random/messy. By analyzing practical implementations and exploring theoretical frameworks, this conference aims to generate a more comprehensive perspective on how standards can effectively shape social, political, and environmental outcomes. Beyond questions of effectiveness, panels discuss standards’ normative implications for democracy. This conference brings together experts to explore the intersection of standards and governance across different phases, including standard setting, the implementation of standards, and their evaluation. The program is structured around five key panels, each addressing different aspects of standard-setting and its impact on sustainability governance, digital transformation, and ecosystem governance. The first day will be concluded by a keynote address that draws connections between the themes of the conference. The conference covers a variety of approaches to standards of governance in different policy fields. However, all panels address tensions between the need for standards to be perceived as legitimate by stakeholders (including governments, citizens, and civil society) and their ability to produce effective outcomes in governing various interrelated domains, such as global supply chains and digital transformations. Related to this are normative questions of who sets the standards that govern technological or socio-ecological transformations, and how these standards impact democratic processes, privacy, and the integrity of public discourse. This applies to digital standards as well as standards in the EU bioeconomy or transport economy, highlighting the influence of various actors (governments, companies, international bodies) in defining these standards. To what extent can standards serve as effective tools for managing complex socio-ecological systems under the conditions of crisis? During the conference we will further explore the implications of applying technical and regulatory standards to natural environments or normative questions of ‘free speech’. What challenges arise when natural ecosystems like oceans, forests, and mountains are treated as infrastructures? By examining both theoretical frameworks and practical case studies, the conference seeks to identify common challenges and highlight emerging areas of research.

## Conference Schedule

Venue: Cas 1.801 (Renate von Metzler-Saal) | Casino (Building) | 1st floor

29 January 2026	
Conference Day 1	
12:30—13:00	<b>Registration</b>
13:00—13:15	<b>Welcome and introduction</b> by speaker team: Jens Steffek and Sandra Seubert
13:15—14:45	<b>Panel 1: Legitimacy challenges of sustainability standards for (global) supply chains</b> Organized by Lena Gigerl and Julia Drubel
Coffee break	
15:15—16:45	<b>Panel 2: Governance through standards: practical implementation &amp; application of standards in Europe's ecological transformation</b> Organized by Charles Thiebaud
17:00—18:30	<b>Keynote by Professor Eleni Tsingou</b> <b>Global standard setting in uncertain times—'small' institutions as anchors of multilateralism'</b>  Copenhagen Business School, Department of Organization   Organizations, Markets and Governance (OMG) <a href="https://www.cbs.dk/en/research/departments-and-centres/department-of-organization/staff/etioa">https://www.cbs.dk/en/research/departments-and-centres/department-of-organization/staff/etioa</a>
Conference dinner at Restaurant Eintracht	

30 January 2026	
Conference Day 2	
9:00—10:30	<b>Panel 3: Standards and the digital transformation</b> Organized by Lea Radke and Sebastian Jaschke
Coffee break	
11:00—12:30	<b>Panel 4: Standards, infrastructure, and the governance of natural ecosystems</b> Organized by Julia Drubel
Lunch (Catering)	
13:30—15:00	<b>Panel 5: Finding a common language? Past trajectories and future avenues of standardization research</b> Organized by Lena Gigerl, David Hengsbach and Stefan Meyer

## Detailed Program

### Conference Day 1, 29 January 2026

#### 12:15—12:45: Registration

#### 13:00—13:15: Welcome and introduction

by the speaker team

Prof. Dr. Jens Steffek, Speaker, Professor of Transnational Governance at the Institute for Political Science at Technical University of Darmstadt.

Prof. Dr. Sandra Seubert, Co-speaker, Professorship of Political Science with a focus on Political Theory, at the Institute for Political Science at Goethe University Frankfurt.

#### 13:15—14:45: Panel 1 Legitimacy challenges of sustainability standards for (global) supply chains

Organized by Lena Gigerl and Julia Drubel

Negative impacts of companies' activities on human rights and the environment often stem from accountability gaps in long, non-transparent, and transnationally intertwined supply chains. These gaps have prompted diverse standard-setting efforts. Most recently, sustainability standards have featured in several legislative proposals from the Global North—not as a stand-alone measure but implemented via certification schemes, mandatory due diligence, and even import/export restrictions.

However, these measures are contested. On the one hand, sustainability governance has been demanded by citizens, activists, some corporations and consumers, on the other hand, already adopted measures have been postponed or watered down. Hence, concerns about their legitimacy—such as inclusion in decision-making—are more pressing than ever and can neither be countered merely by claims of 'wide acceptance' nor their envisioned effectiveness. Standards are not only to be evaluated by their effectiveness, their procedural design, or the resources employed (efficiency), but particularly also always in relation to the value of the pursued goal and its justifications.

Against this background, and in light of the complex issues that sustainability standards touch upon, such as different concepts of accountability, democratic participation in relation to sustainability goals, trade-offs between sustainability goals, and North-South relations, this panel focuses on the relationship(s) between legitimacy and effectiveness in the governance of (global) supply chains via standards. Specifically, this panel discusses the extent to which this standard-setting constitutes an effective and legitimate governance approach to mitigate corporate externalities related to (global) supply chains.

Chair: Julia Drubel

#### Contributions:

Prof. Dr. Almut Schilling-Vacaflor, Chair of International Business, Society and Sustainability, Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, School of Business, Economics and Society.

Dr. Christian Scheper, Senior Researcher at the Institute for Development and Peace, Faculty of Social Sciences, University Duisburg-Essen.

Lena Gigerl, Doctoral candidate at the Research Training Group 'Standards of Governance' at Technical University of Darmstadt.

### **14:45—15:15: Coffee break and finger-food buffet**

### **15:15—16:45: Panel 2 Governance through standards: Practical implementation & application of standards in Europe's ecological transformation**

Organized by Charles Thiebaud

In the context of socio-ecological transformations, new modes of governance through standards are emerging at both national and transnational scales. This panel aims to critically examine the role of standards as tools of governance and to explore how they are accepted, adopted, and implemented in practice.

Standards shape actor behavior, institutional arrangements, and the boundaries of legitimate policy options. They may be embedded in formal regulation—such as when technical standards are mandated by public authorities or codified in law—or operate as private regulatory instruments presented as alternatives to state-based rules. The panel investigates how such instruments govern by structuring expectations, shaping compliance, and embedding norms within Europe's ongoing ecological transformation of industrial and technological sectors.

Particular attention is given to the role of key stakeholders—governments, private actors, and civil society—in negotiating and complying with standards, illustrated through empirical examples such as Global Value Chain and Sustainability Standards, EU climate governance, and the European Green Deal's Fit for 55 package. Of special interest is how the EU employs standards as instruments of indirect governance to influence market behavior, steer investments, and institutionalize climate-related knowledge.

Chair: Charles Thiebaud

#### **Contributions:**

Dr. Axel Marx, PhD, Deputy Director of the Leuven Centre for Global Governance Studies, KU Leuven.

Ellen Mangnus, PhD, postdoctoral researcher in the Sustainable Healthy Diets Through Food Systems Transformation program (SHiFT) at the Chair of Public Administration and Policy Group, Wageningen University.

Prof. Dr. Sebastian Oberthür, Director of the Research Centre for Environment, Economy and Energy at Vrije Universiteit Brussel, and Professor for Environment and Sustainable Development at the Brussels School of Governance. He is also Professor of Environmental Policy and Law at the Centre for Climate Change, Energy and Environmental Law at the University of Eastern Finland.

Andreea Gulacsi, Director, Policy and External Affairs at CEN, European Committee for Standardization, CENELEC, European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardization.

**17:00—18:30: Keynote address: Global standard setting in uncertain times—  
'small' institutions as anchors of multilateralism**  
by **Professor Eleni Tsingou**

Eleni Tsingou, PhD, Professor, Department of Organization: Organizations, Markets and Governance (OMG) at Copenhagen Business School, CBS Principal Investigator of a European Commission Horizon Europe programme grant: 'NAVIGATOR: The EU Navigating Multilateral Cooperation.'

**19:00: Conference dinner**

at Restaurant Eintracht (for speakers only; within walking distance from the venue)

**DAY 2, 30 January 2026**

**9:00—10:30: Panel 3 Standards and the digital transformation**

Organized by Lea Radke and Sebastian Jaschke

Digitalization is transforming almost all aspects of society: the way information and data are consumed, distributed and processed, and how and when communication takes place. One product of this social transformation is the emergence of digital platforms such as search engines, social media platforms and AI-Systems, that put increasing pressure not only on social coexistence but also on the political sphere and democratic states. This panel will focus on the responses to political and social changes linked to the digital transformation, as well as on the extent to which regulation and specific digital standards are used to shape this transformation process. The panel will pursue the following questions: Which actors set standards in the digital realm and why? To what extent are these standards suitable for governing the digital transformation, and how successful are they in addressing specific digital challenges, such as the spread of conspiracy theories or disinformation, the personalization of content and polarization of communication, the structural transformation of the public sphere and privacy, or the social power of algorithms?

Chairs: Lea Radke and Sebastian Jaschke

**Contributions:**

Dr. Julia Pohle, Co-Leader and Senior Researcher at Politics of Digitalization, WZB Berlin Social Science Center.

Prof. Dr. Lena Ulbricht, Professorship of Political Science, Specialization in Politics and Digitalization, Institute of Social Sciences, University of Hildesheim.

Dr. Lucas von Ramin, Scientific Coordinator, Technical University of Dresden, Humanities and Social Sciences Division, Priority Research Area 'Societal Change,' School of Humanities and Social Sciences.

Simona Stano, Associate Professor of Semiotics at the University of Turin, Department of Philosophy and Education Sciences (DFE). Chair of the Master's Program in Communication and Media Cultures (CCM), Deputy Director of the Interdepartmental Research Centre on Communication (CIRCe).

**10:30—11:00: Coffee break**

## **11:00—12:30: Panel 4 Standards, infrastructure, and the governance of natural ecosystems**

Organized by Julia Drubel

The relationship between infrastructure and the natural world is complex and often difficult to define. This panel assembles contributions that speak to this conjunction. In times of global markets, production and consumption networks, we witness ever increasing infrastructure expansion. This not only includes material infrastructures like harbors, forestry roads, mines, but also immaterial infrastructures, like shipping routes, supply chains, and their regulatory-institutional underpinnings. All these developments are driven by standards in form of technical specifications of a product, process, service or system—e.g., providing extraction technologies ((deep-sea) mining, timber logging) or logistic infrastructures (intermodal container transport via ISO standardization connecting deep sea, inland shipping, road, and rail). Furthermore, standardization is politically mandated to advance sustainability goals or used to govern supply chains, e.g., by the EU. These socio-technical systems interact and depend on ecosystems that can themselves be considered infrastructures, e.g., oceans allowing the movement of ships and contributing to food security, forests and mountains as water infrastructures.

Infrastructures, whether material or immaterial, are shaped by standards that dictate which governance tools are considered valid to sustainably manage ecosystems. They shape behavior and perceptions of regulatory objects like land, forests, and oceans. This panel will explore how different standards of ecosystem preservation and restoration define what we consider as ‘oceans,’ ‘forests,’ and ‘mountains’ and how they influence social orders, among others access, benefit-sharing, property rights, including instances of resistance and contestation in these environments.

Chair: Eda Bülbül

### **Contributions:**

Dr. Karen Siegel, Research project ‘Bio -Transformation and Sustainability Governance in South American Bioeconomies,’ Head of Research Group in Political Science, University Münster.

Daniela Triml-Chiffard, M.A., Sozial- und Kulturanthropologie, Philipps Universität Marburg.

Dr. Selen Eren, Postdoctoral Researcher in Science and Technology Studies, project ‘In the shadow of Carbon,’ University of Oulu.

Dr. Julia Drubel, Postdoctoral Researcher and scientific coordinator of the Research Training Group ‘Standards of Governance’ at Technical University of Darmstadt.

**12:30—13:30 Lunch: A vegetarian and partly vegan buffet will be provided**

## **13:30—15:00: Panel 5 Finding a common language? Past trajectories and future avenues of standardization research**

Organized by Lena Gigerl, David Hengsbach and Stefan Meyer

Current research on standards is highly dispersed and deeply grounded in complex empirics. Therefore, conceptual research avenues often take established theories and perspectives as starting point, such as science and technology studies or governance studies, among others. However, standards-specific frameworks and a common language of standardization research in social science are still underdeveloped.

More than ten years after Timmermans & Epstein's (2010) and Busch's (2011) call for a more systematic research program on standards and standardization, this panel traces the development of the corresponding research. By bringing four renowned scholars from different generations and with unique backgrounds together, the panel raises the questions where this research field stands today and where it still needs further development and consolidation.

More specifically, the discussion will be structured around two guiding questions: firstly, why research on standards and/or standardization? And secondly, how has the subject developed over the last 15 years and is there (still) a need for a common research program? In raising these questions, this panel aims to not only take stock of this dispersed research field, but to tease out commonalities of different approaches to standards as well as to standardization.

Chair: Jens Steffek

**Contributions:**

Nils Brunsson, PhD, Professor emeritus at the Department of Business Studies at Uppsala University and affiliated with SCORE (Stockholm Centre for Organizational Research) at Stockholm University and Stockholm School of Economics.

Martha Lampland, PhD, Professor at the Department of Sociology and affiliated with the Science Studies Program at UC San Diego.

Allison Loconto, PhD, HDR, Research Professor at the French National Research Institute for Agriculture, Food and Environment (INRAE) and affiliated with the Interdisciplinary Laboratory for Science, Innovation and Society (LISIS) at Gustave Eiffel University.

Stefan Timmermans, PhD, Professor at the Department of Sociology and affiliated with the Institute for Society and Genetics at UCLA.

**15:00: Closing remarks and goodbye**