

## IASS-Blogpost

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[Dachzeile]

# ACHEMA 2022: The case for transdisciplinary collaboration

A visit to the ACHEMA 2022 trade fair for process industries has strengthened my conviction that dialogue between the business sector, science, politics and society will be crucial to achieving our climate goals.

Last week, as one of 2,200 exhibitors from 51 countries, I had the privilege to attend ACHEMA 2022 (World Forum for the Process Industries – Ausstellungstagung für chemisches Apparatewesen). On behalf of the project [CO2 Win Connect](#), I organized a science rally at the trade fair. The rally aimed to make it easier for school pupils, students and young professionals attending the fair to engage with exhibitors in the Research and Innovation Hall. The participants also entered into the draw to win prizes made from sustainably produced materials and a visit to the BASF plant in Ludwigshafen. Both exhibitors and participants subsequently reported that the rally had led to interesting discussions that they probably would not have had without our questionnaires. Here, once again, the IASS helped to build bridges between industry, science, and the next generation of professionals.

Visitors scan the QR code of our book “Carbon Utilisation for Dummies”. The book can be downloaded free of charge as a PDF. [IASS/Kristina Fürst](#)

I had mixed feelings about Monday night’s opening panel in which a male moderator hosted a discussion among four male CEOs, one from Norway, the others from Germany, all of whom expressed very similar views about the looming transformation of the chemical industry. It was the kind of talk that I rarely hear in my Berlin bubble, including claims that ultimately it is the chemical industry that will decide whether we achieve our climate goals and that competitiveness must become the watchword for German society ([Dr. Martin Brudermüller](#)).

In the circles that I move in, competition is increasingly giving way to approaches that focus on multilateral and intra-societal cooperation. Panel discussions on issues relating to sustainability provide a forum for the sharing of knowledge and experience and look beyond national interests to tackle global interdependencies and climate justice. For example, it is true that German producers are subject to stricter environmental regulations than in many countries of the Global South, and many German companies regard this as a barrier to competition. But the higher prices reflect just part of the environmental costs that the established industrialized nations have been able to offload onto the rest of the world over the last centuries. Today, the countries most vulnerable to the

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destructive impacts of climate change are those that historically [contributed the least to global greenhouse emissions](#).

In political life in Berlin, organizers are generally more sensitive when it comes to the diversity of panels: When women's voices or the views of People of Colour, PoC for short, are not included in panels, and no explanation is given, it doesn't take long for audiences to begin asking questions. Having a diverse panel makes for livelier discussions and facilitates genuine and constructive exchange. Diversity broadens the scope of debate to include the unequal impacts of climate change on different global regions, social groups, and genders.

What is the goal that we are pursuing through our national climate measures ([Nationally Determined Contributions, or NDCs for short](#))? Taken together, the transformation of the economies of the UN member states is expected to limit the global temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. It makes sense to coordinate these national climate measures at the global level if we wish to achieve this goal. Facing a global crisis, we must ditch our focus on maximizing gains at the expense of other countries.

Nor can we leave it to a minority of European men to define which climate measures will be most cost-effective for the international community. For example, the panel at ACHEMA repeated the oft-cited idea that it would be more cost-effective to pay the Brazilian government to stop cutting down the rainforest than to actively invest in carbon capture and storage (CCS) in Europe. I am very much in favour of preserving the rainforest, protecting the indigenous peoples living there, and safeguarding its biodiversity, but such proposals can only be discussed in earnest with the involvement of those directly affected in the region. Just imagine how German industrialists would react if U.S. investor Elon Musk offered to pay the German government to ramp up its efforts to protect the climate so that the U.S. does not have to cut back its steel production and can remain competitive with China! When national, regional, and local [governance structures](#) set to work implementing these measures, the ideas of these men will collide with the incredibly complex realities of life in our diverse global community. The German or European chemical industry alone will not be able to determine the outcome of this transformation. And yet, along with science, politics and civil society, industry will play an indispensable role in ensuring its success. And because of this, it's important that we regularly step out of our feel-good bubbles and discuss things with representatives from other sectors. Ultimately, we need to find compromises that everyone can understand and stand behind.

The opening panel at the ACHEMA on 22 August 2022, with BASF CEO Martin Brudermüller (left). The motto of this year's fair was "Inspiring Sustainable Connections". IASS/Kristina Fürst  
This also means that we as a society must (re)learn to discuss with each other, to weigh alternatives and to grapple with the often complex answers to complex questions. Categorical bans on "new" environmental and sustainability technologies are just as unhelpful as exaggerating the promise of individual solutions as "silver bullets" in the fight against the climate crisis (a curious use of militarized language...). I am talking here, for example, about Carbon Capture and Utilization (CCU) or (green) hydrogen. Technology openness requires first and foremost that study from all angles the effectiveness of a measure for achieving the 1.5° target. As well as its technical feasibility, we must consider its social and economic risks. Public associations, residents, and consumers should be included in this discussion by creating local opportunities for discussion and decision-making, for example. Science has a role to play here by building a knowledge base and supplying relevant knowledge to the public. Ultimately, it will be public acceptance that determines whether cleverly devised energy transition solutions become a reality on the ground.



The idea of a feminist approach to climate politics in which representatives from politics, business, science and society from all regions of the world engage as equals in open discussions in order to bring about sustainable, effective and legitimate change may sound utopian, but shouldn't we be investing far more energy in moving toward this utopia than in clinging to the decision-making structures of yesterday out of a sense of powerlessness or despondency that we know will not lead us (in the most effective way) out of this crisis?

#### Conclusion

I took away several insights from my visit to ACHMEA 2022, the world's largest trade fair for chemical engineering, process technology, and biotech:

1. Face-to-face networking between learners and practitioners from research and industry is indispensable.
2. As a social scientist in a transdisciplinary project that brings together the technical, regulatory, and socio-political aspects of carbon utilization, I am often taken out of my comfort zone – and that's a good thing!
3. It has become common in public forums to respond to complex questions by making divisive and polarizing proposals. The problem is well known - unfortunately, an effective solution is yet to emerge.