



## Research and Dialogue for Sustainable Societies



Dear readers,

We wish you a happy new year filled with new ideas and fresh perspectives. Many such perspectives emerged from the RIFS conference "Tough Conversations in Tough Times." In early December, around 300 participants came together across more than 50 panels to discuss strategies and opportunities for strengthening sustainability even in these challenging times. You can find highlights from the conference — including video recordings of the keynote sessions — in this newsletter and on the [RIFS blog](#).

You can find out more about our work and activities at RIFS in this newsletter. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us: [media@rifs-potsdam.de](mailto:media@rifs-potsdam.de).

Best regards from Potsdam,

**Matthias Tang, Head of Press & Communication**

PS: To learn more about our work between the newsletters, you can follow us on [LinkedIn](#), [Mastodon](#), [bluesky](#) or visit our [website](#).

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**NEWS**

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## RIFS Conference

### Pursuing Ambitious Sustainability Policy in Tough Times

With more than 300 participants, 52 sessions, transdisciplinary exchange and artistic interventions, the RIFS conference Tough Conversations in Tough Times (December 3-5) brought together experts from academia, civil society, policymaking and the field. Over three days, participants explored the growing opposition to ambitious sustainability policies and possible responses to the changing landscape of public debate. The focus of discussions ranged from democratic innovations and sustainable consumption to the impact of artificial intelligence on the transformation towards sustainability.

[Learn more](#)



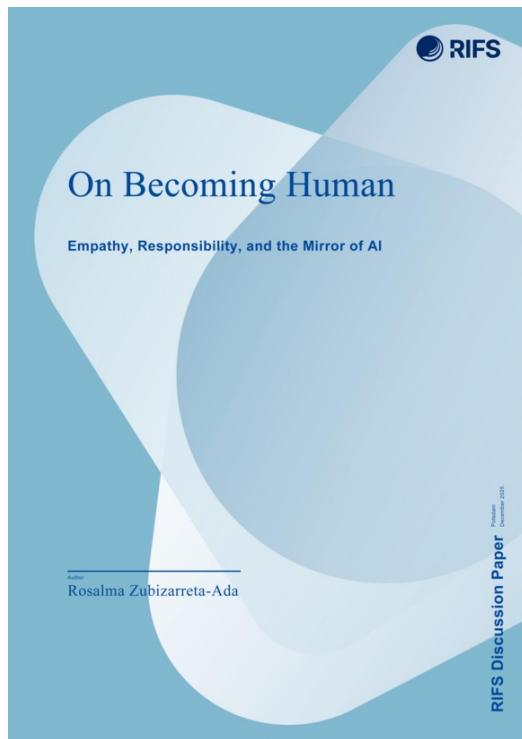
## Horizon Europe Project

### Systemic Risk Governance for Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change Adaptation

Climate change adaptation is a top priority worldwide and is closely linked to the ongoing development of risk management approaches. For the open-access book "Adapting to Climate Change. Implications of Risk-Based Approaches", researchers from the Research Institute for Sustainability (RIFS) contributed a chapter on innovations in climate change and disaster risk management. Drawing on recent findings from a European research project, the chapter illustrates how innovations can enhance resilience, bridge local and systemic perspectives, and support continuous learning in risk governance.

[Learn more](#)

## PUBLICATIONS



Zubizarreta-Ada, R. (2025): **On Becoming Human: Empathy, Responsibility, and the Mirror of AI.** - RIFS Discussion Paper, December 2025.

<https://doi.org/10.48481/rifs.2025.037>



Holmberg, A., Milton, M., Elverum, S., Morin, E. (2025): **Ethical Collaborations in Arctic Research: Guidance for Researchers and Indigenous Communities.** - RIFS Brochure.

<https://doi.org/10.48481/rifs.2025.029>

DOWNLOAD

## PROJECTS

### Developing Roadmaps to Scalable Carbon Dioxide Removal by Enhanced Silicate Weathering (RESET)



The EU has set itself the goal of becoming climate neutral by 2050. To achieve this, it is not enough to drastically reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions; CO<sub>2</sub> must also be removed from the atmosphere. In the RESET project, researchers are investigating how Enhanced Weathering of silicate rock can permanently remove CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere.

[Learn more](#)

## VIDEOS



## RIFS Conference 2025: How can we advance sustainability at multiple levels in times of backlash?

### Panelists:

- Farhana Yamin, climate lawyer & expert for climate and development policy, Richard von Weizsäcker Fellow
- Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul, former Federal Minister of Economic Development and Cooperation
- Katja Dietrich, Mayor, Municipality of Weißwasser
- Susanne Buitner, Scientific Executive Director, GFZ Helmholtz Centre for Geosciences
- Moderation: Julia Vismann

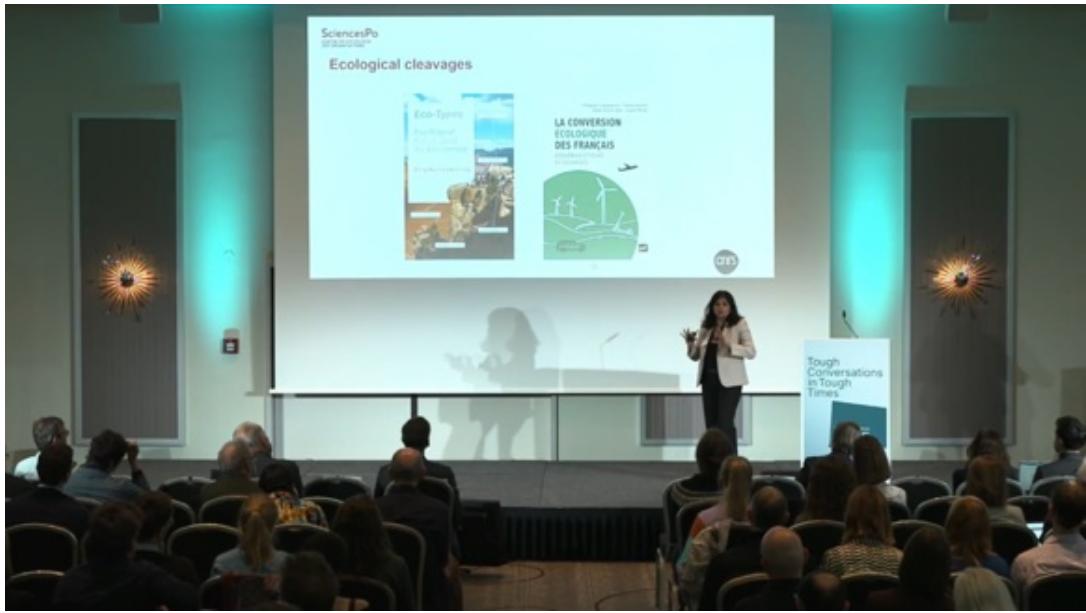
[Watch the video on Youtube](#)



## RIFS Conference 2025: Keynote by Jürgen Trittin

In his keynote speech at the first RIFS conference, Jürgen Trittin, former Federal German Minister for the Environment and long-standing politician with Alliance 90/The Greens, analysed the development of the climate debate from broad consensus to deep polarisation. He opened with the provocative question of whether there was an "end of reason". He then explained that the climate debate is now dominated by a well-organised minority who deliberately stir up fears and deny facts. This group, supported by the fossil fuel lobby, uses the media, social media algorithms and populist rhetoric to divide the public.

[Watch the video on YouTube](#)



## RIFS Conference 2025: Keynote by Manisha Anantharaman

We all have an interest in protecting our planet. But our unequal living conditions make it difficult to forge cross-class alliances for an ambitious sustainability policy. In her keynote speech "Building 'We' in a Wounded World" at the RIFS Conference 2025, Manisha Anantharaman (Sciences Po Paris) made an appeal to researchers and leaders: they should learn from the people who are fighting environmental problems on the front line to explore the types of political coalitions that challenge entrenched power structures.

[Watch the video on YouTube](#)



## NEW ON THE RIFS BLOG

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Tough times, tough conversations: Reclaiming the sustainability agenda

Julia Plessing, Germán Bersalli

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Thinking about the world from its end: Finding hope in a changing Climate

Julia Plessing

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Investigating the invasive mussels of Lake Müggelsee

Stephanie Cussans Moran

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Climate Change as a Symptom of Collective Trauma:  
Why Sustainability Requires Healing, More Than Just  
New Policies

Adina-Iuliana Deacu

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Academic extractivism – How are we fostering ongoing colonial relations with(in) our institutions?

Nina Charlotte Rabe

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Weaving new narratives for transdisciplinary sustainability research  
Felix Beyers, Philip Bernert, Andra-Ioana Horcea-Milcu

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International Men's Day at RIFS: What we heard, what we missed, and what gender equity might be asking of us

Adina-Iuliana Deacu

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Thinking about non-anthropocentric immanent aquatic deities

Stephanie Cussans Moran

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Are we currently facing the 'end of reason'?

Sabine Letz

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"Seeing each other's pain" – in search of a new "we" in sustainability policy

Bianca Schröder

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## EVENTS

20.01.2026 -  
22.01.2026

Interdisciplinary, Participatory Engagement for Co-Developing  
Knowledge Communication Strategy

26.01.2026 -  
27.01.2026

Workshop

'Deconstructing communities' : An in-person workshop.



Want to learn more about  
us and our research?

[TO OUR WEBSITE](#)



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 **GFZ** Helmholtz-Zentrum  
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