



## PhD Position on Power Dynamics in Conservation Movements

One PhD position (E13 TV-L, 65%) for 3 years

Starting date: From 1st June 2026 or earlier

Reference number: DR/019/26

**Application Deadline: 28 February, 2026**

The Geography Department at the Humboldt University of Berlin invites applications for a PhD position (initially 3 years) on understanding power dynamics within conservation movements. The successful candidate will join the project “Understanding and Shifting Power in Biodiversity Conservation by Integrating Insights from Social Change Movements” (POWERSHIFT), funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) under the Biodiversa+ Joint Research Call “Biodiversity and Transformative Change (BiodivTransform)”.

POWERSHIFT is led by Dr. Juliette Young (INRAE, France) in collaboration with Dr. Jacqueline Loos (University of Vienna), Dr. Laura Pereira (Stockholm University), Dr. Ranjini Murali (Humboldt University, Germany), and the Istituto di Ecologia Applicata (Italy).

The position is based at the Conservation and Development Lab (<https://hu.berlin/47188>) at Humboldt University, Berlin. The position includes travel to field sites and research visits to consortium partner institutions. Remuneration is according to TV-L E13, 65% (German public sector pay scale).

### Project background

Power shapes whose knowledge counts, which priorities dominate, and how costs and benefits are distributed across conservation initiatives. However, power imbalances within conservation initiatives remain comparatively underexplored, including how they enable or constrain transformative change. Many initiatives continue to be grounded in Western worldviews and may exclude marginalised groups from decision-making, contributing to conflict, inequity, and poor biodiversity outcomes. POWERSHIFT addresses this gap by examining how power operates in biodiversity conservation at multiple scales, and how tackling power imbalances can support more just, effective, and sustainable governance. The main objectives of the project are:

- 1) Objective 1 (WP1): Understand how power dynamics operate within and across local interventions, initiative-level organisations, and collaborative conservation networks, and how these dynamics shape social-ecological outcomes
- 2) Objective 2 (WP2): Explore how scenario-based visioning and strategy mapping can enhance collective agency and alignment within collaborative conservation networks to shape power-sensitive transformation pathways
- 3) Objective 3 (WP3): Investigate how reflective practice across dimensions of power can foster learning, support institutional change, and build capacity for navigating power dynamics
- 4) Objective 4 (WP4): Test how power-sensitive strategies can be adapted to policy contexts and scaled through cross-sectoral and cross-movement collaborations

The PhD candidate will primarily work on WP1 and WP4, while contributing to other WPs. The project will examine how power-sensitive strategies can move from conservation practice into policy spaces and how alliances across sectors and movements can support equitable and effective governance. The candidate will have scope to develop their own research focus within this framework.

## Tasks and responsibilities

- Design and conduct an independent PhD project aligned with POWERSHIFT, focusing on power dynamics in conservation movements and social-ecological outcomes.
- Engage with policy-makers in the EU and in the field sites, and contribute to policy-relevant outputs.
- Conduct fieldwork in arid mountain ecosystems.
- Participate in and document transdisciplinary workshops with practitioners.
- Analyse and interpret data using appropriate qualitative and/or mixed methods.
- Publish in peer-reviewed journals and contribute to practice-oriented outputs (policy briefs, guidelines, workshop materials).
- Present findings at international conferences and practitioner meetings.
- Support project coordination as needed (e.g., organising workshops, liaising with partners).

## Required qualifications

- Master's degree (or equivalent) in a relevant field (e.g., environmental or sustainability social science; human geography; political ecology; conservation science; sociology; political science; interdisciplinary environmental studies with strong social-science components).
- Demonstrated interest in power, justice, inequality, or governance in conservation contexts.
- Training in qualitative social research methods (e.g., semi-structured interviews, focus groups, ethnography, participatory approaches). Openness to mixed methods is an asset.
- Strong analytical and writing skills, including the ability to work conceptually with theories of power, institutions, and social-ecological systems.
- Ability and willingness to conduct fieldwork and collaborate with diverse actors (NGOs, community groups, government agencies, networks).
- Very good command of English (written and spoken).
- Strong communication skills, self-organisation, and ability to work independently and in a diverse team.

## Desirable qualifications

- Experience engaging with policy-makers, transdisciplinary work, facilitating workshops, or action research/reflective practice
- Working knowledge of any of these languages: German, Russian, or Kyrgyz
- Experience with basic quantitative methods is a plus, but not mandatory.

HU Berlin is one of Germany's top-ranking universities and hosts a nationally and internationally leading Geography Department. HU is also well-linked with multiple research institutes in Berlin, and the Berlin-Brandenburg area. Further, it is situated in Berlin, a diverse and dynamic city, offering rich cultural life, great connectivity, and a high quality of living. HU Berlin is an equal opportunities employer. Applications are especially encouraged from women. Applicants from snow leopard range countries are particularly encouraged to apply. Applicants with disabilities will be given preferential consideration given equivalent qualifications.

Applications should include: 1) motivation letter (max. 2 pages) 2) CV 3) A writing sample (e.g. Master's thesis, article, or report) 4) Contact details of two referees. Please send your application as a combined PDF file to Ms. Barbara Richter ([barbara.richter@geo.hu-berlin.de](mailto:barbara.richter@geo.hu-berlin.de)) by **28 February 2026**.

For more information, please contact Prof. Dr. Ranjini Murali ([ranjini.murali@hu-berlin.de](mailto:ranjini.murali@hu-berlin.de)).

*The legally binding version of this advertisement is the German version: <https://hu.berlin/92263>*