Democracy in general enjoys a high level of support in society – but the everyday political practice is met with skepticism. Many citizens feel their interests are no longer represented in an adequate way. Their criticism is directed at institutions and decision-making processes that are considered out of touch with citizens. Overall, balancing the interests of a highly individualistic society is becoming more and more complicated. In addition, many citizens feel a growing unease due to the limited scope of national decision-making power in times of globalization.

We need new formats to make democracy attractive again and to strengthen the overall societal trust in democratic processes. Current global challenges such as climate change or migration need trustworthy and open discussions as a basis to jointly develop sustainable solutions.

With its various activities, the HUMBOLDT-VIADRINA Governance Platform aims to foster this basis for sustainable decision-making. We developed the Trialogs as a format especially targeted to strengthen trust in political decision-making processes and to support decisions oriented towards the common good.

If you have any questions, suggestions or are interested in cooperating with us, please do not hesitate to contact us.
THE CONCEPT OF TRIALOGS

Our Trialogs are one-day multi-stakeholder discussions with about 50 participants from the public sector, the business sector, organized civil society, academia and media. In our Trialog events participants discuss societal challenges of today and tomorrow on an equal footing. Trialogs offer an open and at the same time confidential room for debate. All participants are encouraged to substantiate their arguments and connect them to the different perspectives of other stakeholder groups – regardless of diverging power positions. Trialogs are thus different from classical consulting formats, consultations, lobby talks or expert conferences.

1 Multiple perspectives.

Trialogs bring together a variety of perspectives that are sometimes antagonistic. The more positions are integrated into the discussion, the broader the knowledge base for sustainable decisions. In that way, we support a common understanding of stakeholders from the public sector, the business sector, organized civil society, academia and media. Due to their different functions, experiences and power potentials these stakeholder groups cover a broad spectrum of relevant societal perspectives:

Democratic politics is legitimized through elections to make decision that are binding for society as a whole. It has to face the overall task of balancing varying societal interests and power potentials. At the same time, it’s decision power is limited due to increasing global interdependencies and is becoming more and more complex due to diverging societal positions.

The business sector has no democratic legitimization. Over the past decades, however, it has gained pivotal global influence and power. Therefore, it needs to be included in multi-stakeholder discussions. Many companies have come to acknowledge that a supporting environment based on democratic and accountable principles is an enabling factor for their own long-term economic success. This environment is also shaped by the business behavior itself.

Organized civil society is not dependent on elections or legislative periods and does not have to bow to compromises of power. As long as it acts in a way that is oriented towards the common good, it enjoys a high level of public trust. Civil society is an important driving force for social innovation and can serve as a corrective for socio-political developments.

2 Factual arguments.

Trialogs go beyond pointing out the variety of arguments presented by the stakeholder groups. Participants are asked to substantiate their points of view in the discussion and refer to arguments brought up by other participants. Guided by a trustworthy moderator these arguments can then be linked to each other. This sets a common ground for understanding and allows for a change of perspectives so that discussions can take on a new direction. With our discussion format, we can overcome an often gridlocked debate. The following questions lie at the core of our Trialogs: Where can participants find a common approach to the topic? Where do different interests of participants intersect and allow for a perspective that takes the well-being of society into account?

Academia brings new findings into the societal debate. The mutual exchange between science and society connects separate types of knowledge and paves the way for well-founded and sustainable conclusions.

The involvement of media supports the public debate by sharing the key arguments of the discussion with a broader audience. This works as an enabling factor for mutual societal understanding.

3 Profound consensuses.

We ensure that the results of our Trialogs are comprehensible and support decision-making processes sustainably. Thus, our Trialog concept also includes a thorough scientific analysis of the discussion based on the transcript. The analysis helps to determine where different arguments meet and to outline common fields of actions. We identify consensus corridors to pave the way for a common understanding and sustainable solutions to societal challenges.