



## **School of Public Leadership, Stellenbosch University**

### **Postdoctoral Fellow Position**

#### **Research Theme: Environmental Governance and Communication**

#### **Topic: Renewable energy discourse in the South African news**

#### **Background and context:**

The renewed interest in low-carbon renewable energy (RE) systems follow from growing concern about global climate change as well as energy security pressure. RE systems promoted for their carbon emission savings capacity include wind, solar, biomass (bioenergy), geothermal, carbon capture, hydropower, nuclear and natural gas. Understanding the political climate which provide the context to energy transitions is crucial to identifying the key role players, their interests, and preferences, and how they influence energy policy outcomes. Energy issues are open to political contestation which, in turn, draw on discursive strategies of diverse actors to influence policy pathways. Even when renewables are preferred energy options, their installations in a local community may evoke resistance. Furthermore, while there are varieties of low-carbon energy technologies, popularity and public acceptance differ between types. These reasons point to the need to examine how renewable energy policy is negotiated discursively in a polity. As citizen mobilisation can spur political support for transitioning programmes, it is proposed in this study to examine media representation of energy discourse as one pathway through which citizens make sense of RE and lend support to energy transitions in South Africa.

Understanding the mechanisms of public deliberation on energy issues is needed to unmask social knowledge, values and perceptions about energy transitions in societies. When public deliberation is understood to be aimed at enriching common understanding, it can be argued that mass media provides an important sphere where such processes take place. Mass media serves as a conduit of information about emerging technologies that potentially influence public perceptions and the evaluation of importance. Consequently, there has been an increased interest in public discourse as represented in mass media in several contexts, including Australia, The Netherlands, Canada, Germany and the United States of America. These studies highlight that the media extend the space of relations between diverse social actors engaged in a struggle to establish meaning and influence perspectives on energy politics. Acting as “claims-makers” or “news sources”, the actors help “to construct the definition of [the] social problem” associated with energy issues. The literature indicates that studying media portrayal of emerging energy technologies can reveal markers of public opinion, attitudes, and acceptability.

The proposed study will thus focus on the forms of sense-making around RE taking place in the South African media landscape, an area that is still relatively understudied. Interest in deliberative sense-making around RE seeks to unmask socio-technical nuances around the evolution of renewables as alternatives for building energy futures. Such nuances include how citizens interact with knowledge about renewable technologies and make sense of them, and how the process inform public attitudes towards RE policies and the adoption of renewables technologies.

The aim of the research is to assess the extent to which RE discourse in South Africa accommodates diverse social actors and promotes a multiplicity of perspectives on the complex problems associated with renewable energy in today's carbon constraint world. It is expected that analyses of different actor representation and of network and framing used will take place to reach the study's aims.

An appointment will be made for not less than 12 months and not more than two years.

The postdoctoral bursary is **R 230 000** for 2022 which is tax free. There are no additional benefits since postdoctoral fellows are not appointed as employees. This grant is initially awarded for a period of one year, with possible extension to a second year depending on good progress and the availability of funds.

### **Tasks:**

As a postdoctoral fellow the incumbent will work with Professor Martin de Wit at Stellenbosch University who will be the academic supervisor. The postdoctoral fellow will be expected to write at least one conference paper and two full-length, peer-reviewed journal articles over the course of the first year of the post-doc appointment.

### **Requirements:**

- A PhD (must have graduated within the last five years) from a recognised academic university in an appropriate field of study related to environmental governance, renewable energy or climate change communication (preferably in an African context) and with knowledge and experience in the social or management sciences.
- Experience in conducting research at an advanced level in a multi- and interdisciplinary environment.
- Proven ability to work with computer-assisted qualitative analysis software (preferably Atlas.ti) and having a well-developed sense of its strengths and weaknesses
- Good network of international professional, research and training contacts
- Excellent command of the English language
- At least two journal articles published or accepted for publication in peer-reviewed journals.
- Ability to work in a multi-stakeholder environment.
- Proven knowledge and experience in interdisciplinary research and data collection among mass media outlets, journalists and affected citizens will be an added advantage.

### **Enquiries:**

Ms Adell Rhode on +27 21 808 2195 or Prof Martin de Wit at [mdewit@sun.ac.za](mailto:mdewit@sun.ac.za)

Commencement of duties: 2 January 2022

Closing date: 11 November 2021

Application procedure: Send a letter of application, accompanied by a comprehensive curriculum vitae with a list of publications, copy of ID or passport, academic transcripts of postgraduate studies, a PhD certificate or a letter from the registrar confirming that the University's requirements of a doctoral qualification has been satisfactorily fulfilled, and the names and contact details of at least two referees, to [mdewit@sun.ac.za](mailto:mdewit@sun.ac.za)

Referee reports: Applicants should request their referees to forward confidential reports as soon as possible to [mdewit@sun.ac.za](mailto:mdewit@sun.ac.za)

The University reserves the right not to make an appointment.