

Bettina Furrer



Research topics and role within SCCER

Bettina Furrer is Professor for Sustainability and Technology at Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW) and since 2012 Head of its Institute for Sustainable Development (INE). She also holds the position of Deputy Head of the SCCER Energy Society and Transition (CREST). Bettina's research focuses on the interface between sustainability and technology with particular emphasis on the sociotechnical transition of energy systems. Other research interests are technological innovation systems and business models related to and financing of renewable energy and energy efficiency.

Biography, carrier path

After her graduation in Environmental Sciences at ETH Zurich, Bettina worked for UBS where she built the environmental management system and the bank's corporate responsibility strategy. After the birth of her first child, Bettina decided to leave UBS in order to spend more time in research. In addition, the position as lecturer at ZHAW allowed her to work part time and to dedicate time to her young family. During her first years at ZHAW, she completed her PhD thesis on "Corporate Climate Strategies and their Determinants", supervised by Volker Hoffmann at MTEC ETHZ.

In 2012, Bettina was appointed Head of the Institute of Sustainable Development INE with the responsibility of sharpening its profile. She established its main focuses on sustainable energy systems, sustainable mobility and technology assessment/risk management. Today more than 25 researchers and lecturers work at the institute.

Bettina is mother of three children aged 12, 9 and 5. She currently works 80% and shares the responsibility for the family with her husband.

What do you find fascinating about the energy field?

I am generally fascinated by technology and its interconnectedness to society. Smart technological solutions and new "gadgets" fascinate me. Energy transition is extremely relevant for society and a very challenging process. The energy markets and the related sectors are rapidly changing. This opens up opportunities for "smart" solutions where technology and the needs, behavior and acceptance of individuals and firms can be optimally matched. The huge number of different stakeholder groups involved in energy transition - from policy makers to service providers and consumers - with different and sometimes opposing interests opens up many interesting research areas.

And the SCCER program?

The SCCER has been a great opportunity to pursue new research approaches and to interact with related research groups in Switzerland and abroad. A lot of effort has been put into building up a common research agenda and a network. So far, the work in SCCER CREST has been an enrichment for my institute and for me personally.

Is your research field equilibrated (men-women)?

No, obviously women are underrepresented in the MINT areas (mathematics, informatics, natural sciences and technology). In this sense, SCCER CREST is active with a mentoring program (also open to men) and ZHAW is committed in different ways to increase the interest of more female students for MINT subjects and to provide a flexible work environment.

Recommendations for young women wishing to pursue a career in the energy field?

Choose a career that inspires you and that fits your skills. This will help you overcome many barriers. Look out for role models and support – not only from women but also from men that often face the same challenges when balancing career and family. Set clear and conscious priorities with respect to your career, family life and you personally. Once you have children, organization is a constant issue.

Your "work-balance" recipe?

I try to plan one activity per day just for myself. It can be sports, read a book, listen to music or meet a good friend. Once per year, I take a short vacation all by myself.

Interview: Gloria Romera (SCCER Mobility), September 2015