

- » At a glance
- » **Structure**

## Overview

🔊 Listen

The study program follows a triad analysis from present, past and future. This is supplemented by profound methodological training: qualitative and quantitative methods of empirical social research as well as transdisciplinary and participatory approaches are part of the program.

The course utilizes a transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary study approach. Therefore, it is important to systematically and continuously reflect on the possibilities, challenges, and limitations of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary science and practice. Themes surrounding this topic are included in the colloquium "Transformation Research" which accompanies all four semesters.

## Recommended course of studies

1	Modul GD (20 LP): <b>Module GD: Analysis of the Contemporary – Socio-ecological Transformations and their Problemization</b>	Modul KT (15 LP): <b>Research Training: Cultural Transformation – Food, Housing, Mobility</b>	
2	Modul HR (20 LP): <b>Historical Reconstruction – Theory and Practices of Social Change</b>	Modul M (5 LP): <b>Quantitative and Trans-disciplinary Methods</b>	
3	Modul VZ (20 LP): <b>Varieties of the Future</b>	Modul TD (5 LP): <b>Transformation Design</b>	Modul PRA (5 LP): <b>Internship</b>
4	Modul TH (30 LP): <b>Master's Thesis / Master's Colloquium</b>		

A detailed description of the individual modules can be found below:

### Module GD: Analysis of the Contemporary – Socio-ecological Transformations and their Problemization

The focus of this module is put on the analysis of the contemporary. Students learn different disciplinary approaches to present socio-ecological challenges. The module discusses and brings together different approaches and global effects of the societal model of the early industrialized countries of the global North.

The module consists of the obligatory colloquium of transformation research as well as of six events of which four must be attended.

#### Courses of the Module Analysis of the Contemporary

##### Colloquium of Transformation Research (compulsary)

Socio-ecological transformation research is interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary in design. This is the reason why the courses offered within the Master's degree program "Transformation Studies" are taught by academics from a variety of disciplines. The student body will consist of Bachelor graduates from different academic backgrounds – there are no disciplinary restrictions for admission. Inevitably, different perceptions on social and ecological challenges will be encountered within the program. The participants attending the course will pose their own disciplinary questions and will contribute their own knowledge, insights and methodical approaches to the topics at hand. The colloquium of transformation research offers an environment where the particular challenges, possibilities and also the boundaries of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary learning, teaching and research are continuously reflected.

##### Socio-ecological Crises and Conflicts

Ecological crises are ultimately socio-ecological crises, both in their causes and in their consequences. This can be demonstrated particularly with the example of human-made climate change: Climate change displays fundamental social dimensions in its causation as well as in its effects. For this reason, the anthropogenic warming of the earth has increasingly become the object of social scientific considerations during the last few years. The submodule introduces the scientific foundation of the current ecological crisis and focuses on the historical as well as contemporary theories dealing with the interplay of nature and society. This also includes the interactions with global environmental governance. Other thematic areas cover: the socio-structured impact of so-called natural disasters, social causes, consequences and working forms of the current climate crisis such as climate change and economics, "climate discourses in science, politics and the media" and "environmental and climate migration" as well as "climate change and violence".

### **Global and Regional Damage to the Environment**

Water pollution, conflicts about the distribution of drinking water, distress caused by extreme weather conditions, air pollution and the threat to biodiversity are just some of the ecological crises affecting us on a global scale. The submodule provides an overview of such developments and their causes. It further depicts interdependencies and identifies possible alternatives and solutions. In terms of content, this submodule is oriented towards environmental protection products which are, among other things, discussed by the Agenda 21, the CBD, EU directives, the UVPG, the BNatSchG and other international and national regulations on the protection of the environment: water; air, climate; soil; flora and fauna (conservation of biodiversity, animal welfare); human, health; landscape and recreation; cultural and material goods. The subject areas are deliberated from a large scale perspective: from transregional to global, in order to exemplify and debate the interconnectedness and the complexity of the topic, while continuously keeping the overarching aspect of responsibility in mind.

### **Spatial Transformation Processes**

Today's world is characterized by global processes of change which affect the transformation of the natural environment as well as space-relevant social processes. In addition to global climate change and global resource scarcity, the focus of this course lies on population growth, food security as well as global migration and urbanization processes. These changes are mainly discussed at a global level but their concrete negotiations take place at national, regional and local level. From a geographic perspective, the module covers spatial effects of global transformation processes on different scales. Based on conceptual underpinnings from geography and political ecology, current social-ecological topics and their local spaces of negotiation in different parts of the world are examined.

### **Subject, Social Practice and Transformation**

Socio-ecological crises are linked in many ways to the practices of actors. Society, ecology, and subjects are not opposites but are constituted in and through practices. At the same time, these practices represent both distinct space as well as social limitations for the individual. This is due to the fact that on the one hand, the subjects hold knowledge about ecological and socio-economic crises but on the other hand this knowledge does not necessarily lead to a transformation of action. Actors cannot be thought of without their social and ecological contexts, these, however, would be unimaginable without acting actors. In this submodule the question of the relationship between subject, society and ecology is examined from a theory-based perspective of the subject.

### **The Digital Society**

Socio-theoretical analysis of the contemporary describe a current transition from a modern, disciplinary industrial society to a postmodern, individualized, digital knowledge and network society. The future society can either adapt to the forms of the supervised controlling society, steered and controlled by data and algorithm, or it can release the potential of a networked cooperative participatory culture. An essential feature of such a – still to be shaped – participatory culture is collaboration and sharing. Within the scope of the module the different development vectors of the "digital society" are to be measured, in particular with regard to education, work, social exchange and individual self-relations, and then analyzed to aid in the formulation of concrete design options.

### **Political Economy**

The aim of the submodule is to enable students to differentiate four core paradigms of the political economy as well as to understand and apply their internal logics. An introduction into neoclassical mainstream, Keynesianism, classical political economy and institutionalism will be provided. Based on the respective central question-perspective of the paradigms, the scientific-theoretical and methodological consequences of basic decisions are reflected as well as their consequences for the understanding of economics, society and the natural environment in general. After completion of this course, students should be able to understand the paradigmatic strategies from within the approach while critically reflecting on them from the outside and from their own individual point of view. On the basis of recent developments it will be exemplified where and to what extent the traditional world of thoughts are changing, mixing or recombining. The module is seminar-oriented: key texts will be discussed and deliberated. By means of group work and presentations several case studies will be analyzed and debated from the different paradigmatic perspectives.

## **Module HR: Historical Reconstruction – Theory and Practices of Social Change**

The present state of society is the result of extensive transformation processes in the past. In the module 'Historical

Reconstructions – Theories and Practices of Social Change' past developments of social change are therefore reconstructed and analyzed. Local, regional and global transformation processes are considered, focusing on the last 200 years since the beginning of industrialization. The aim is to reconstruct the emergence of the Western modern model of society from different disciplinary perspectives, including its metabolism of nature.

The module consists of the obligatory colloquium of transformation research as well as of six events from which four must be attended.

## Courses of the Module Historical Reconstruction

### Change of Societal Relations to Nature

What exactly does the railway, a T-shirt from H&M or a deep-freezer have to do with nature? Nature is often understood as a contrast to society, culture or technology. However, the concept of social natural circumstance is based on the relationships and reciprocal links between nature and society. Here, the material-energetic as well as the cultural-symbolic basis of societies is taken into consideration. The concept of social nature raises the question of how the interrelationships between human beings, society and nature can be understood, researched and shaped, since they are central to the productive and reproductive capacity of societies.

This submodule aims at understanding the concept as well as its scientific involvement and to apply it to concrete examples chosen by the participants. The goal is to analyze and critically discuss the change in societal nature on the basis of theoretical and empirical research; in order to finally be able to assess whether and in what way a train, a pizza or a T-shirt provide information about the present dominant interactions between nature and society.

### Theories of Social Change

Questions of social change have always been at the center of sociological reflection. These questions include: What are the drivers of social development? What role do actors play in social change? What is the significance of ideas and conflicts? Is social change a social norm or rather an exception? What are the possibilities for people to influence social development? And: What unintended consequences are to be expected? As a first step of this submodule, classical sociological theories (such as Marx, Weber and Elias) are read and debated with regard to their model of social change. Subsequently, contemporary analyses are given attention, such as Hartmut Rosas's acceleration theory or the transition studies' "Multi Level Perspective". The aim is to provide students with an in-depth insight into sociological theory building in order to be able to assess current processes of change more appropriately.

### Social Differentiation and Social Inequality

In modern society, different spheres such as politics, economics, law, but also art, religion and education have become separated into independent, relatively unrelated fields and systems. At the same time, modern society reproduces a high degree of social inequality every day, which manifests itself in different social classes, strata and milieus. In this module, we will discuss how these two types of social differentiation are related by reading and discussing sociological classics as well as recent sociological texts.

### Global North / Global South

Global interdependencies are not a recent phenomenon but can often be attributed to evolved historical structures. The module deals with the current links between locations of the Global North and the Global South, in particular with regards to colonial structures that continue to live in current political, social and economic practices. This module, in light of the historical path dependency, takes classical and alternative concepts of development and their measurement into consideration. Additionally, current global interdependent structures such as migration movements, goods and service flows, foreign direct investments or land purchases are illustrated from a postcolonial perspective on the basis of several case studies.

### Social change in Architecture, Design and Art

The students will experience and reflect on exemplary historical aspects of art, design and architecture as models of individual life-style on the one hand and as a counter-project to social realities on the other. For example:

- › Functionalism and purism as a counter-movement to historicized and antique-like forms of civil practices of living and representation (Bauhaus, etc.)
- › Aspects/facets of upper class home decor and their adaptations in workers' apartments
- › The industrialization of the beautiful and individual (stucco, Art Nouveau furniture from the catalog of the early 20th century, etc.)
- › Art as the projection and idealization of the world ("bellling stag") and as a critique and counter-design of social reality (for example Dadaism)

In addition, the students will explore aspects of valuable or reproduced historical elements, respective misalignments in today's global consumption as well as everyday and media culture in manageable settings. In this regard, their historical references under aspects of difference and similarity will be addressed. This includes for example:

- › Forms of the presentation and representation of the self in the digital media age in relation to the analog media period
- › Historical perspectives on art on walls in different social/cultural settings of the present
- › Historical quotations, applications and ornaments in today's everyday cultures
- › Historicized everyday forms of home-making and comfort with reference to alleged historical design elements

### Normative-evaluative Dimensions of Social Transformation Processes

The shaping of social transformation processes has necessarily normative-evaluative dimensions. In this module, students are familiarized with the normative orientation and evaluation of social transformation processes, which are taught from a philosophical perspective. This will be done in a twofold way: first, students will acquire both methodological competences which allow them to make reasoned or critical assessments, second, students will receive knowledge about ethical theories that can be used to create action and evaluation criteria. In particular, sustainability theories will be utilized as an assessment standard. Furthermore, ethical questions regarding the design of transformation processes is addressed, an aspect that also affects the prospective responsibility towards the environment.

### Colloquium Transformation Research (compulsory)

Socio-ecological transformation research is fundamentally interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary. This is also the reason why the courses within the Master's Program "Transformation Studies" are offered by academics from a variety of disciplines. The student body will consist of Bachelor graduates of different thematic areas – there are no disciplinary restrictions on admission. As a result, different perceptions on social and ecological challenges we are facing today will meet. The course participants will contribute their own disciplinary questions and insights as well as knowledge and methodical approaches to the study program. The colloquium of transformation research is a course during which the particular challenges, possibilities and also the boundaries of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary learning, teaching and researching are continuously reflected.

## Module VZ: Varieties of the Future

The module 'Varieties of the Future' focuses on various future development opportunities. Reaching from technical solutions to dynamics of political governance, sustainable consumption and production, or alternative economic models, to possible changes in the energy sector as well as their social prerequisites. The socio-ecological crises, which are increasing both qualitatively and quantitatively on a worldwide scale, indicate that societal transformation is already taking place and that such processes are to be expected in the future. However, it is not clear how transformation takes place and whether it is constrained by circumstances or whether it is politically formable. The focus of this module is the question of how the achievements of modern societies can be sustained and further developed under the conditions of strongly reduced natural consumption.

The module consists of the obligatory colloquium of transformation research as well as of six events from which four must be attended.

### Courses of the Module Varieties of the Future

#### Post-growth Societies and Alternative Economic Models

Modern capitalist societies are growth societies. This implies that they gain their stability and their ability to reproduce by constantly generating economic growth. However, the realization that unlimited growth is not possible in a limited world is spreading vastly. In addition, the pursuit of increasing growth has had devastating effects from an ecological, political, economic and social point of view. Under the keywords "post-growth", "degrowth", "décroissance" and "reductive modernity" the causes, conditions and consequences of growth orientation and growth logic have been increasingly discussed on a global platform during the recent years. This also implies discussions about alternative economic models and the prerequisites for societal transformation. This submodule exemplifies the central discourses of growth criticism and debates various initiatives and approaches that seek to move away from the growth-imperative.

#### Organization and Transition

Organizations make up the pillars of modern society, as highlighted by the broad discourse available on "organizational society". The analysis of social transformation processes can, therefore, not be done without taking a closer look at organizations. At the same time, however, the emergence, structure and change of organizations are decisively influenced by society. In this respect, organizations and society are mutually dependent and constituted. The submodule 'Organization and Transition' covers the discussion of relevant theoretical explanatory approaches with regard to the subject and development of organizational transformation processes. Starting from the transmission of central social and organizational theories, the students will be introduced into the diverse and innumerable array of discourses on organizational change theories and will be able to critically assess selected explanatory approaches. A special focus of the course is given to the relationship between organizations and their societal, social and natural environment.

#### Ecology and technology

Biological knowledge and processes are used in various technical procedures. Conversely, many organisms and habitats are also affected by technical processes. The cross-section of ecology and technology covers not only all fields of agriculture, forestry, water and waste water treatment but also engineering processes within the field of energy production, food production and the cosmetics industry. All selected topics are concerned with modern technical procedures on the one hand and with life processing of animals, plants or micro-organisms on the other. In this submodule, specific questions from the above-mentioned cross-sectional themes are discussed in cooperation with external speakers at the local and regional level. Emphasis is given to the question of how to organize concrete processes and procedures in the sense of environmental compatibility.

### Power and Rule

The fact that society is pervaded by power and rule is an established theme within the wider field of sociology. Based on classical as well as recent literature, this module discusses how phenomena of power and domination appear both as a direct and obvious force and are then brought back to barely visible micro-politics of power or symbolic violence. The main questions are: What legal, cultural or material conditions allow certain forms of power and domination? What are the impacts of power relationships on the body, lifestyle, gender and the possibility of becoming politically active? This is followed by discussions on the legitimacy of power and about possible acts of resilience.

### Utopias and Dystopias

Developing concepts of society beyond the present state of development seems to be a primal human need which can be found in different forms (initially orally and pictorially, later in writing, audio-visually and also virtually). Out of this basic need, the two genres of utopia (gr. = non-place) and anti-utopia or dystopia (gr. = bad place) have developed in the artistic media. While utopia mostly represents the philosophical or literary design of an ideal state and thus, according to Ernst Bloch, a conceptual pattern in which the "principle of hope" is realized linguistically, dystopia is to be understood as a narrative taking place in the future which takes up real social developments that are fictionally continued with a negative outcome. In the submodule 'Utopias and Dystopias' this basic need of human society is being investigated from its early beginnings (e.g. Platon: Politeia; Old Testament: The Tower of Babel, respectively Sodom and Gomorrah) including most compelling works such as those from Thomas Morus. During the course of the module (it is first necessary to distinguish the features of both genres as well as possible delineations from each other), classical writings as well as contemporary works are being discussed in different medial forms of representation. It is important to question what is reflected in the respective drafts of the future as to what should be changed in the present. Which areas of society are addressed and which concept of 'improvement' is presented? Perspectives are not limited to the literature and media sciences but also include anthropological, political, philosophical and social-ecological themes. In addition, it is necessary to discuss why dystopian intended corporate designs dominate utopian ones in the present. Has our postmodern society abolished the power of utopia and thus lost all hope for an ideal social form?

### Collective Formation of Social Change

Social change is a complex process that can only be guided and controlled to a limited extent. Both the idea of social progress that is connected to the Enlightenment, as well as the more recent, biologically and economically oriented principles of evolution and growth develop their own social dynamics both in the positive and in the negative sense. These can be rarely controlled by individual action. In this context, concepts such as the discursive influence of societies, collective action, communicative reason, or collective responsibility are the focus of philosophical considerations, dealing with the possibility of creating social and political spaces. These concepts incorporate very different elements of such formations, including amongst others, rules and norms, emotions and claims, (self-) attributions of duties and rights, etc. The submodule invites the critical reflection on such forms and elements of social organization.

### Colloquium Transformation Research (compulsory)

Socio-ecological transformation research is fundamentally interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary. This is also the reason why the courses within the Master's Program "Transformation Studies" are offered by academics from a variety of disciplines. The student body will consist of Bachelor graduates of different thematic areas – there are no disciplinary restrictions on admission. As a result, different perceptions on social and ecological challenges we are facing today will meet. The course participants will contribute their own disciplinary questions and insights as well as knowledge and methodical approaches to the study program. The colloquium of transformation research is a course during which the particular challenges, possibilities and also the boundaries of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary learning, teaching and researching are continuously reflected.

## Module KT: Research Training: Cultural Transformation – Food, Housing, Mobility

What and how much populations in the Global North eat today, how they live and how they travel has changed over the past 200 years. Here, interactions between economic growth in capitalist societies and cultural change cannot be disregarded. Since the beginning of industrialization in the middle of the 18th century, the pursuit of ever-growing growth started while at the same time laying the basis for several processes of social, political and cultural transformation. Together, this led to fundamental change in the eating, housing and mobility culture. While this period can be attributed to enormous gains in freedom on the one hand, it brought with it social as well as ecological crises on a global scale – nutrition, housing and mobility are referred to as three climate-relevant everyday practices in research – on the other. The module is devoted to exploring the various aspects of past and present processes of cultural change under the overarching question of how change is brought about and by whom it is designed and what consequences can be observed. The goal is to investigate the dynamics, the conditions of action and its results, the subjective perspectives of the actors and the superordinate temporal processes by carrying out research projects. The students will conduct their own research projects on the subject of cultural transformations and will go through all stages of a research process: problem definition, development of a questionnaire, elaboration of the state of research, acquisition of knowledge of qualitative social research, development of the research design, field research and finally the analysis of the materials. The research training also offers space and opportunity to reflect on all of the steps of this process in small groups as well as in plenary discussions.

## Module M: Quantitative and Transdisciplinary Methods

In Module M, students will learn about various methods of collecting, evaluating and presenting quantitative social research as well as about different approaches to transdisciplinary research (including its history, reasoning and ethical implications). The students will examine and practice the evaluation of the benefits and limitations of the respective instruments with regard to concrete social-ecological questions. In addition, the methodological challenges and ethical implications of transdisciplinary research will be discussed.

## Module TD: Transformation Design

The transformation of the present dominant economic, social and cultural model is inescapably taking place. Whether it can be shaped on the basis of civilizing achievements, such as democracy, freedom, the rule of law, social equality and solidarity or whether it is enforced more strongly by its circumstances remains to be seen. The overarching question of this module, therefore, addresses the way in which the achievements of civilization are sustained under the conditions of drastically reduced material and energy consumption. General discussions about a society that is guided by the search for a 'good life' and social justice will be included throughout the course. Transformation design cannot be defined as a creative task that is aimed at the redesign of ever-changing products, but rather focuses on the transformation of the social under the condition of lower natural consumption. Therefore, it is necessary to deal with the cultural and social use of energy, substances and products, including communication and the consumption or nutrition and mobility infrastructure. In this module, students will be able to apply their theoretical knowledge in practice by developing and planning a project that carries the potential of socio-ecological transformation. The seminar uses creative teaching methods of idea generation and development as well as tools for project planning and financing. At the end of the module, the students will have developed a detailed project concept, as well as having intensively reflected on possible challenges and coping strategies. The aim of the module is, therefore, to provide a basic understanding of how to conceive and plan your own project. Focus is hereby put on the challenges inherent in social-ecological change. An implementation of the developed projects is possible and can be further supported by consulting / coaching.

## Module PRA: Internship

The module consists of a four-week full-time internship or an equivalent covering the same timeframe in which the students gain practical experience in institutions or organizations that deal with socio-ecological transformation processes. Examples of institutions include state and non-state environmental organizations, initiatives in the field of solidarity agriculture or the common good economy, environmental and CSR departments of companies or environmental organizations, etc.

## Module TH: Master's Thesis

All students have to write an 80 to 100-page Master's thesis which should reflect self-reliant research and analysis as well as the scientific elaboration of a topic covered by the teaching and research contents throughout the course. The accompanying Master's colloquium discusses general (work-related) questions. In addition, the colloquium offers opportunities to present work and research conducted and to receive feedback from the supervisors and fellow students. The colloquium aims to support the participants in the content and the methodical aspects of their Master's thesis.

[Back to top](#)   [Page # 22076](#)   [Permalink](#)   01/09/2020