

THE LEUPHANA TRANSFORMATION LAB CONCEPTUAL OUTLINE

Overview

With the Leuphana Transformation Lab, Leuphana University is creating a cross-faculty infrastructure for cutting-edge research on transformation. It has the twofold purpose of implementing interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary collaboration and of generating innovative research results through a coordinated process of knowledge integration. The Lab combines scientific with active transformation goals: it seeks to develop both academic and actionable knowledge on transformation processes and to produce real-world outcomes through education and research-practice partnerships.

The Leuphana Transformation Lab is being implemented with funding from the Lower Saxony Ministry for Science and Culture and the Volkswagen Foundation. In 2025, Leuphana University was awarded 18.5 million Euros for its [*Embracing Transformation*](#) research development programme, which was designed to advance interdisciplinary and internationally networked research in Leuphana's key areas of expertise regarding transformation processes: digital cultures, entrepreneurship, democracy, organization, sustainability, and psychology. With the Leuphana Transformation Lab as the programme's cornerstone, Leuphana seeks to strengthen its role as an action-oriented university that facilitates transformation processes through research, education, and knowledge exchange.

Interdisciplinary Collaboration and Experimentation

The Leuphana Transformation Lab is designed as an open space for interdisciplinary collaboration and experimentation with collaborative research practice. Located in Leuphana's central building, the Lab is the *Embracing Transformation* programme's central research infrastructure and a vital point of intersection for the Principal Investigators, early career researchers, international fellows, and collaboration partners working in the programme's Key Subject Areas¹ and the *Psychology of Transformation* (see below). The Lab will thus offer unique opportunities for scholars from different subject areas, disciplines, and research cultures to come together and engage in a dialogue on the scientific and practical issues of transformation, to pursue new research perspectives and to explore methodologically innovative forms of collaboration.

Transformation is a complex change process that cannot be grasped through solitary and unconnected research efforts. The Lab addresses this issue by aiming for a genuinely collaborative research based on interdisciplinary research formats. This approach is not only content driven: Through a focus on methodology, the Lab seeks to advance interdisciplinary research practices in the field of transformation research and to experiment with new methodologies and forms of knowledge production such as art-based research. In particular, and drawing on Leuphana's extensive academic and on-campus engagement with art², a collaboration with practitioners from design disciplines, art and media culture is planned that will produce *new imaginaries* for the transformative effort.

Knowledge Integration

Embracing Transformation is a unique interdisciplinary research endeavor: It joins together scholars working in all of Leuphana's five faculties (Culture and Society, Management and Technology, Public Affairs, Sustainability, and Education). More than 60 professors, up to 50 early career researchers and 70 research fellows will be involved in the projected research spanning a funding period of five years. At its core, the Leuphana Transformation Lab will function as an infrastructure for knowledge integration that ties together research activities and engages all participating researchers in joint knowledge production. A combination of methods and formats for knowledge integration will be applied and tested in an iterative and reflective process coordinated by the Lab's management team.

¹ Leuphana is developing five [Key Subject Areas](#) through the *Embracing Transformation* programme: 'Climate Futures in Digital Cultures', 'Companies as Drivers of Sustainability Transformation', 'Democratic Resilience', 'Organizing in Times of Crisis', and 'Towards a Regenerative Society'. Each Key Subject Area takes up focal issues of transformation and represents an innovative research initiative within the fields of interdisciplinary research already established at Leuphana.

² With the [Leuphana Kunstraum](#), the university has its own campus space for art events and exhibitions.

The knowledge integration process will be supported by a *research communication* officer who will make transformation knowledge available to audiences inside and outside of academia using a diverse range of media and public-facing forms of research output.

The integration process will be based on a three-fold model that combines scientific, practical, and educational goals:

1 Interdisciplinary Interface Work

A partial knowledge integration will take place on the level of the Key Subject Areas through interdisciplinary interface work. Researchers working in these different areas will team up in varying constellations in order to work on key terminologies, identify points of intersection between the Key Subject Areas in general and individual research projects in particular. The Lab will thus create a productive research environment in which researchers working in the fields of digital cultures, entrepreneurship, democracy, organization, and sustainability can make their knowledge and data available to each other. This form of integration can lead to innovative conceptual work, new interdisciplinary collaborations, generate new research questions, and provide new insights into the interconnectedness of complex transformation processes.

2 Producing Transformation Knowledge for Society

Aiming for high societal impact, a key aspect of the knowledge integration process is the production of actionable transformation knowledge. To this end, the research results obtained in the Key Subject Areas and the Psychology of Transformation will be synthesized and translated into transferable and communicable forms of knowledge about transformation processes and the possibilities for shaping them.³ Formats for knowledge integration will include interface workshops, task-specific working groups, conferences, interdisciplinary colloquia, and spring or summer schools.

Based on the transformation knowledge generated from research, the Lab will also develop educational formats for teaching *transformative literacy*. This newly created content will be disseminated through Leuphana's study courses and continued professional education programme, thus fostering society's capabilities to understand and consequently act upon transformation processes.⁴

³ While the development of a shared model of transformation knowledge is a collaborative task to be undertaken as part of the overall knowledge integration process, the term is taken here to refer to basic knowledge about transformation processes as the product of transformation research, which investigates framework conditions of transformation and possible ways of shaping it (see [WBGU 2016](#), p. 513). Understood in this broad sense, transformation knowledge comprises all three types of knowledge outlined by the *Swiss Academy of Arts and Sciences* and established in transdisciplinary research on sustainability transformation, which are systems knowledge, target knowledge, and transformation knowledge in the narrow sense of knowing of concretely possible means of implementing a desired transition (see [CASS/ProClim 1997](#)).

⁴ For a definition of *transformative literacy*, see [Schneidewind 2013](#).

3 Towards an Epistemology of Transformation

Knowledge integration at the Lab will not be merely additive. The goal is to create an integrative framework for investigating transformation on a broader epistemic level. Most notably, this is to provide the foundation for a critical engagement with transformation, combining the systematic reflection of terms, concepts, methods, and paradigms with an intent to pluralize our understanding of transformation and its various normative and political contexts. Importantly, this perspective will address transformation as a knowledge problem, reflecting on the different kinds of knowledge – from global systems knowledge to so-called indigenous, local or vernacular knowledges – that are needed to embrace transformation, both critically and practically.

This purposefully encompassing approach, which is both encyclopedic and reflexive, has the potential to develop into an ongoing collaborative effort in interdisciplinary theory-building. The outlook of the knowledge integration process is thus the emergence of an integrated conceptual framework for transformation research that can serve as a boundary object connecting heterogeneous bodies of knowledge.

The Psychology of Transformation

At Leuphana University, psychological research is conducted as an [interfaculty hub science](#) – with the psychology of sustainable behavior being one of the major research fields. The Leuphana Transformation Lab will take up this interdisciplinary effort and provide the integrative framework for the development of a comprehensive psychology of transformation. The knowledge integration process will thus be extended to include the following research constellations:

- 1) The Lab will bring together psychology scholars working in different faculties, fields and subdisciplines on the question of transformation. While previous psychological studies into behavioral changes have predominantly focused on the effects of isolated factors and mechanisms, the psychology of transformation will aim for an integrated analysis of sustainability interventions.
- 2) Studying the conditions for behavioral change puts into focus the possibility of sustainability transformation on the level of individual action – a level relevant to *all* areas of transformation. The psychology of transformation will therefore traverse the Key Subject Areas as a cross-cutting topic. Not only will psychology scholars be involved in the research of the Key Subject Areas. The knowledge integration formats outlined above will also provide further links between these areas and the Psychology of Transformation, significantly broadening the interdisciplinary scope of Leuphana's transformation research.

Transdisciplinary Transformation Research

While the initial focus of the lab activities will be on knowledge integration within an interdisciplinary research setting, the Leuphana Transformation Lab also aims for the integration of non-academic perspectives and knowledge. It will feature transdisciplinary research-practice partnerships and host stakeholder dialogues in which the transformation knowledge produced as an outcome of the Lab's transformation research will be critically discussed together with practitioners, entrepreneurs, and other relevant actors in economy, politics, and civil society.

In a long-term developmental perspective, a stronger involvement of non-academic actors and the co-production of transformations knowledge is planned. As transformation knowledge also comprises knowledge that is co-created in transdisciplinary research projects which initiate and evaluate transformation processes, the lab will include transdisciplinary and experimental research designs such as real-world-laboratories at a later stage. Its activities will therefore progressively add active transformation goals to its focus on scientific advancement in selected fields of transformation research.

Transformative Research for Lower Saxony

Following the distinction made by the *German Advisory Council on Global Change* between 'transformation research' and 'transformative research',⁵ the Lab seeks to add an activating approach to its knowledge production by developing solutions for core problems of transformation identified by the state of Lower Saxony.⁶ To this end, researchers from other universities in Lower Saxony working in the natural, technical, and engineering sciences will be invited to the Lab in order to collaborate on application-oriented projects on a regional level. These pilot projects will include a reflection on the necessary contribution of the humanities, cultural studies, and social sciences to the production and dissemination of scientific and technological innovations.

International Networking – Globalizing Transformation Research

A major epistemic goal of the Lab is to diversify paradigms of transformation, in particular by identifying and providing alternatives to Western-centric ideas of sustainability transformation. In support of this goal, transformation research at the Lab will be strongly internationally oriented: Through collaboration with international guest researchers, the

⁵ While *transformation research* has transformation as such as its subject matter and studies the conditions and means for realizing it, *transformative research* is research that generally advances transformation through the development of technical and social innovations (see [WBGU 2011](#), pp. 21-24 and 351-353).

⁶ See the [Agenda zukunft.niedersachsen](#), which designates energy, mobility, resource-efficient economic activity, health, education and knowledge as prioritized transformation tasks for the state of Lower Saxony.

international doctoral programme *Knowledge Cultures of Transformation*, and a newly to be established fellowship programme on epistemes and dispositives of change at the intercultural [Leuphana Institute for Advanced Studies](#) (LIAS), the Lab will create an internationally networked research environment in which transformation can be thought against the backdrop of globalized society.

Early Careers at the Leuphana Transformation Lab

With the *Embracing Transformation* programme, Leuphana is creating opportunities for doctoral candidates and postdoctoral researchers to pursue a career in transformation research. The Leuphana Transformation Lab will have a pivotal role in this process by inviting the early career scholars working the Key Subject Areas and the Psychology of Transformation to participate in its research and exchange formats. The Lab is a place for networking on an international level, for exchange among peers, for interaction with senior faculty members from various disciplines, and for expanding methodological skill and mind sets to include interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary perspectives. In an important addition to their disciplinary training, early career researchers will thus be able to acquire the epistemological agility and flexibility to navigate the wide range and variety of transformation discourses in their career.

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