

LEUPHANA TRANSFORMATION LAB FRAMING

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1. MISSION AND VISION STATEMENT

1.1. MISSION

What is transformation? Where is transformation situated? For whom and when is transformation a desirable prospect? We start from the observation that the contemporary world is riddled with crises: ecological disruptions, climate tipping points, technological paradigm shifts, wild economic and financial pendulum swings. Differential experiences of such multitudinous transformation contexts condition whether transformative processes are embraced or rejected. Transformation's discontents and disadvantages are as important as its benefits; losers in transformative projects are as crucial of understanding transformation as are its winners. Engaging these diverse perspectives on what it means to transform at different scales—societies, governments, ecologies, economies, but also individuals, organizations, or communities—requires care. In short, we recognize that the idea of transformation, along with its desirability and directionality, remains fiercely contested. Holding diverse perspectives in tension is our collective responsibility.

The Leuphana Transformation Lab envisions transformation neither as a singular event nor as linear process but as a plurality of intertwined social, ecological, cultural, and technological changes whose meanings, consequences, and desirability must remain subject to critical inquiry. Our mission is to become a catalyst for rigorous, imaginative, and responsible research on transformation with the goal of building a distinct school of thought on transformation. Engaging with the complex mosaic of transformation research requires connecting different disciplines, knowledge systems, and actors within and beyond the university. The Lab is a space where these complexities can be examined critically and rethought collaboratively, such that together, we can begin to make sense of the uneven patterning of transformative projects.

1.2. VISION

The Transformation Lab begins from the premise that transformation is a contested term. Its multifaceted nature cannot be captured through a single definition or disciplinary lens but requires a deeper inter- and transdisciplinary approach. Transformations unfold with uneven impacts—bringing opportunities as well as costs, generating frictions as well as aspirations. Our scholarship asks: Who benefits from transformation? Who bears its burdens? Who drives which modalities of transformation? And how can plurivocal narratives shape what is considered desirable or just? Drawing on cross-disciplinary methods and conceptual work, the Lab seeks to illuminate and compare transformations across diverse fields, scales, and contexts. Developing concepts capable of attending to transformation in this plural and contested sense contributes to research on the development of our independent school of thought. Rethinking the role of Academia in understanding – and shaping – transformative practices informs our work on transformation literacy.

The Lab serves as a space for collaboration across disciplines, recognizing that no single method, discipline, or standpoint can grasp transformation in its entirety. We bring together scholars from the social sciences, humanities, sustainability sciences, economics, psychology, and the arts to work on the multifaceted topic of transformation. As a space for experimenting with creative, art-based, and mixed-method inter-ventive approaches, we enable scholars to develop their own approach to the emerging field of transformation research. We foster encounters that support innovative research practices and methodological exchange. At the same time, the Lab also remains open to communities beyond the university, creating a

space for shared inquiry and learning with broader publics in the region and beyond. We engage global communities of practice including policymakers, cultural actors, and businesses.

The Transformation Lab is both locally integrated and globally oriented. It links existing institutional structures and connects to Leuphana's wider intellectual ecosystem. The Lab collates and shares knowledge developed within Embracing Transformation, connecting researchers across the five key subject areas and psychology as a hub science. We provide platforms for synthesizing empirical and conceptual work, translating ideas across disciplines, and adapting conceptual tools from across all schools. At the same time, the Lab positions Leuphana at the cutting edge of transformation-oriented research and practice. As part of an expanding global network of universities and research institutes, we push the boundaries of scholarly inquiry into transformative processes. By collaborating with our sister labs and international partners, we contribute to building a worldwide community dedicated to understanding and shaping transformations in socially just, environmentally sound, politically responsible, and culturally imaginative ways. The Lab will thus help strengthen the Leuphana's research profile as well as increase its appeal and visibility in the academic community.

2. RESEARCH CHARTER

2.1. RESEARCH IN THE LAB

Transformation research must engage critically with social-ecological realities as they are lived and experienced in unevenly distributed ways. Foregrounding the contested nature of transformation processes and discourses, research conducted in the Transformation Lab builds on foundational conceptual work through which the uncertainties of transformation are continually refracted. The Lab conducts research across different thematic fields, which are brought together through shared conceptual and terminological work. Research is refracted through three conceptual streams: Epistemologies of Transformation, Disruption and Transformation, and Scales and Temporalities of Transformation. Building the insights generated from conceptual and empirical work, we ask what it means to be literate in transformation and develop modalities of translation for understanding change across disciplines and practices. The Lab approaches transformation as multiplicative – as an ongoing process rather than a singular event – which requires continuous critical reflection on how change unfolds, for whom, and with what consequences. To that end, our methodological stance is decidedly ecumenical, incorporating also embodied knowledge, perspectival knowledge, partial views, artistic practice-based inquiry, and designerly prototyping as legitimate and necessary forms of knowing.

Research in the Lab is iterative and experimental: a space for codesigning and coproducing knowledge, where artists and scientists work together, not to illustrate one another's work, but to co-produce knowledge through different modes of inquiry and expression. At the same time, we foreground the discontents of transformation. A sense of unease, discomfort, and friction within and derived from transformation discourses serves as a powerful diagnostic and generative force, signaling where dominant narratives fail or where deeper questions need to be asked. Insisting upon critical reflection allows tensions, exclusions, and contradictions to surface rather than smoothing them, thereby keeping the notion of transformation open for continual reinterpretation and reimagination.



2.2. COLLABORATION

Working together in the Transformation Lab means treating collaboration itself as an object of care and continuous negotiation. The Lab's role as a key node within a larger multi-actor environment marked by differential knowledge bases means that it has to constantly translate between different knowledge systems, specific disciplinary languages, and methodological commitments. Rather than assuming shared understandings, we take translation as one of our core practices. This work requires engaging proactively with transformation networks while doing the often invisible work of making concepts, values, and approaches mutually intelligible without forcing consensus or fully dissolving disciplinary boundaries. As part of a web of interconnected sister labs, the Transformation Lab actively shares knowledge and methods and convenes diverse actors for conceptual work and strategic dialogue. Ethical considerations core to this process, guiding our approach to global and local collaborations.

The Lab does not take collaboration for granted; instead, it continually asks how working together can remain productive across disciplines and responsible to our research partners. We facilitate collaboration by identifying and amplifying strengths – of people, institutions, structures, practices, and perspectives – rather than focusing solely on problems or deficits. We aim for collaboration to be generative where new ideas emerge dialogically, through encounters that combine practical experimentation with theoretico-conceptual reflection. Co-creation and co-intellectual work are understood as practices that must remain open to questions rather than settled formulas. In this way, collaboration is not merely a means to an end but a proactive, constructive mode of engaging with transformation itself.

The Lab is home to a collective knowledge repository that supports shared ownership while deliberately keeping differences, tensions, and incommensurabilities visible. Visualizing the complexities of transformation is a central aspiration, thus rendering intelligible and discussable the many practices and discourses that seek social, political, ecological, and economic change.