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# **IRS Research Programme 2026 -2029**

## **"Collaborating with Society"**

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## Introduction

At the turn of the year 2025/26, the IRS will adopt a new research programme. The title "Collaborating with Society" refers to the common thematic focus under which scientific work is carried out in the institute's three main areas of research.

With this programme, the IRS is responding to profound social challenges and an expanded role for science, which no longer works only for society, but also **with** it. The aim is to open up the knowledge process to non-academic actors. At the same time, the programme underscores the IRS's commitment to combining scientific excellence with social relevance and actively contributing to the management of current transformation processes.

We are taking up social debates on the growing importance of participatory and transdisciplinary research and want to contribute to applying and further developing this form of knowledge generation in our field – spatial social science and contemporary historical research.

The researchers at the IRS already have a wealth of experience from projects that incorporate the knowledge of non-academic actors. Building on this, this expertise will be systematised, expanded and deepened over the next four years. It will also be strengthened institutionally through targeted organisational development. At the same time, we at the IRS are developing new forms of cooperation between science and society and are actively shaping the dynamically growing field of participatory and transdisciplinary research. With its focus on social sciences and contemporary history with a spatial dimension, the IRS can thus enrich the dialogue between space-specific perspectives and participatory approaches, which has been conducted on a selective basis to date.

The research programme was developed immediately after the evaluation of the IRS in October 2024, which attested to the institute's successful development and at the same time pointed out prospects for the future. The evaluation report recommends making the research at the IRS even more visible internationally. The programme understands internationalisation as a cross-cutting task, already identifies concrete measures and at the same time leaves room for in-depth strategy development together with the IRS committees.

At the same time, a fundamental renovation of the listed main building is imminent. Once the construction work is complete, IRS employees will work in a modernised environment that supports the goals of the research programme and opens up new spaces for collaboration and exchange.

## 1. Collaborating with Society

According to current diagnoses of the times, the world is in a phase of disruptive change characterised by multiple, overlapping crises, fundamental uncertainty and escalating conflicts. As a result and symptom of this change, political configurations (domestic coalitions, international partnerships, economic cooperation) have become unstable. Democratic processes are increasingly lacking legitimacy, and protests and conflicts are on the rise. In the socio-spatial policy fields studied by the IRS, social dysfunctions are lamented, such as the seemingly unstoppable rise in rents on urban housing markets, growing socio-spatial inequalities, and even "left-behind" peripheral areas and unfair distributions of the benefits and burdens of transformation risks and gains, which cause "bitterness" (Hannemann, Henn and Schäfer 2024). Added to this are large-scale projects that are getting out of hand or further looming missed opportunities for grassroots innovation.

At the same time, despite growing challenges, collective capacities for action are diminishing. The democratically legitimised political-administrative system is heading towards a veritable "governance crisis" (Reckwitz 2025) in many policy areas. A lack of output legitimacy strengthens populist, reactionary and anti-democratic political forces. Government coalitions and programmes are increasingly incorporating contradictory social expectations, thereby creating internal blockages (Beckert 2024) that further reduce the legitimacy and efficiency of democratic decision-making processes to minimal consensus and non-transparent negotiations. Due to the dynamically escalating situation, political work is increasingly taking place in crisis mode: decision-makers react in the short term to urgent, uncertain and threatening scenarios (Broer et al. 2024). They deal with problems of an intergenerational dimension in time horizons that no longer even cover the already limited thinking in legislative periods.

The social developments described above have fundamental consequences for scientific work:

1. The fragmentation of control capacities and actors accompanying increasing conflicts is leading to a "new complexity" in spatial development. Not only are existing control approaches coming under pressure, but the field of actors is also becoming more complex. The coordination of public, private and civil society actors and the intertwining of political decision-making levels has so far been described using the formula "from government to governance". Today, however, the question is becoming increasingly urgent: who can still govern? Capacity for action is increasingly less located solely in parliaments and public administrations, but rather in increasingly complex and dynamically changing situations involving a wide variety of actors and interests. As a result, academia no longer has a clear target audience for its recommendations, but finds itself in a broad field of interpretations, interests and negotiations. Against the backdrop of the necessary transformation to a more sustainable society, it can easily get caught between the fronts and must position itself in a variety of social debates.
2. Actors from politics, administration, civil society and the private sector need new, expanded powers of action based on broadly shared perceptions of problems and viable, socially negotiated compromises. New knowledge is needed that provides long-term orientation and at the same time promises a high degree of social adaptability. In view of these expectations, the understanding of the social role of science and research is changing. On the one hand, discipline-based specialisation continues to be needed, but on the other hand, complex and pressing

problems require the interdisciplinary consolidation of heterogeneous knowledge bases and, in addition, the integration of diverse social knowledge bases that have been developed in a context-specific manner and tested in (local) practices.

Science is thus operating in a volatile and complex social environment that is increasingly developing towards a "post-normal" (Funtowics and Ravetz, 1993) state. For institutionalised research, this means that it must increasingly grapple with the fact that facts are becoming increasingly uncertain, scientific expertise is increasingly being challenged by non-academic forms of knowledge (Brinks and Donner 2025) that spread in a self-organised manner, primarily on social media – ranging from lay expertise to ideologically motivated "alternative facts" – and also challenge fundamental social values. It can therefore be observed that the systemic boundary separating the research system from other social systems is becoming increasingly porous, with society interfering in research and research interfering in society. Nevertheless, despite these growing uncertainties, scientific expertise is more in demand than ever, as decisions must be made under uncertainty, with a lot at stake for all involved.

In this situation, research that is committed to social and political consulting in a special way, true to the Leibniz motto *theoria cum praxi*, can and must work with society in new ways. Against the backdrop of these developments, science must increasingly not only work *for* society, but also *with* it. This new, expanded role of science is already reflected in numerous research projects at the IRS. In recent years, the IRS has collaborated extensively with representatives of civil society, state institutions and economic initiatives. The institute has initiated cooperation networks and demonstrated its ability to contribute scientific expertise to these collaborations in a profitable manner. The title of the new research programme does not therefore refer to a new topic, but rather underlines the growing importance of an aspect of our previous research practice. It draws attention to the theoretical, methodological and thematic consequences that arise from the increasing significance of participatory and transdisciplinary research.

The new research programme aims not only to further develop scientific findings for practical use in dialogue with society. Rather, the process of knowledge acquisition is to be opened up in a targeted and controlled manner to non-academic actors from society. During the four-year programme period, the IRS therefore intends to systematise, expand and deepen its expertise in *participatory and transdisciplinary research* and to further develop it institutionally through organisational development. On the other hand, new ways of cooperation between science and society are to be developed and the dynamic growth of participatory and transdisciplinary research, which is also taking place outside the institute's, is to be actively shaped.

We understand **participatory** research to mean processes in which citizens contribute to knowledge acquisition on an intrinsic basis, but also take on limited and predefined functions, such as in traditional citizen science formats in which citizens contribute to data collection or data validation. Key functions such as the development of research questions, research design, publication of findings and organisation of the research process remain the responsibility of academic experts. Research processes in which academic and non-academic actors collaborate on an equal footing in joint research processes are considered **transdisciplinary**. The leading role can change during the course of the process, and the intensity of the respective contribution can be adapted to the respective motivation of the participants. The insights gained are applied to solve practical problems and fed

into scientific discourse. In the following, we use "participatory and transdisciplinary research" as a fixed phrase to make it clear that this research programme is concerned with a broad spectrum of forms of cooperation between science and society.

## 1.1 The research field of participatory and transdisciplinary research

With its new research programme, the IRS is focusing on a form of knowledge production that has gained in importance in recent years as "participatory" and "transdisciplinary" science. The central credo of these research directions is a recalibration of the relationship between society, science and politics by overcoming the historically grown distance between scientific and practical knowledge and thus also redefining the role of science in the knowledge society (Hirsch Hadorn et al. 2008). Firstly, participatory and transdisciplinary research approaches promise that combining scientific expertise with non-academic knowledge will yield more adequate insights into the nature of social problems – insights that cannot be gained through disciplinary or interdisciplinary research alone. Secondly, participatory and transdisciplinary research enables collaboration between science, practitioners and civil society across the various phases of a research process – from problem definition and analysis to the development of solutions. This not only allows for the identification of practical and socially acceptable solutions to problems, but also enables them to be tested and implemented (Pohl et al. 2021).

The field of transdisciplinary research – after isolated publications in the low double digits worldwide in the 1970s and 1980s – has been slowly but steadily taking shape since the 2000s. An increasing engagement with participatory and transdisciplinary forms of research can be observed, particularly in the context of environmental research and sustainable transformation, as well as in the fields of education and health research (<https://en.transdisciplinarity.ch/literature/publication-analysis/publication-radar>; Darbellay 2015). However, research approaches specifically related to spatial science have been largely absent from publications in this field to date (*ibid.*).

Parallel to the emerging theoretical and methodological contours of the research field, international efforts have also been underway since the 2000s to strengthen the research field through appropriate institutionalisation measures. Switzerland is the European pioneer in this field with its Network for Transdisciplinary Research (td-net), founded in 2003 (Paulsen & Kueffer 2023). Transdisciplinary research and teaching is now firmly established at the four central universities and two research institutes here and is supported by various funding instruments from the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF), which, in addition to transdisciplinary research collaborations, also explicitly promotes qualification work by scientists at different career stages in this field, or from the Swiss Agency for Innovation Research (Innosuisse).

In Germany, key initiatives for the development and formulation of transdisciplinary research were launched in 2001. The work of the Frankfurt Institute for Social-Ecological Research (ISOE) is particularly noteworthy in this regard. The German Advisory Council on Global Change (WBGU) also addresses the topic in its 2011 main report, emphasising the central importance of transdisciplinary cooperation and research in dealing with the increasing challenges of transformation. As a result, the BMBF (BMFTR) is supporting increased engagement with forms of cooperative collaboration and

research through strategy papers (Strategy Paper 2016, Green Paper 2021, Participation Strategy 2023) and funding programmes such as "Innovative Municipalities" and "City of the Future". Initial state funding in Baden-Württemberg and North Rhine-Westphalia (Grunwald et al. 2020) and private funding institutions have also followed suit in recent years, such as the Volkswagen Foundation with its "Social Transformations" profile area. However, it should be noted that these funding instruments are not always tailored to the specific processes and needs of transdisciplinary research in particular. Science policy initiatives are also supporting initial forms of institutionalisation, with the "td Academy", temporarily funded by the BMBF from 2020 to 2025, which provided a supra-regional networking platform for transdisciplinary and participatory researchers at universities and research institutes in Germany. However, this focused exclusively on the scientific examination of transdisciplinary research approaches. In 2023, this initiative led to the founding of the Society for Transdisciplinary and Participatory Research (GTPF). The working groups of this professional association are currently formulating position papers, guidelines and requirements for the institutionalisation of transdisciplinary research in regular scientific operations, as well as criteria for funding and evaluation.

Similar developments can also be observed in other European countries. In the Netherlands, the National Expertise Centre for Transdisciplinary Work (NECTR) will be established in 2025, and funding for participatory and transdisciplinary research is available through various instruments of the Research Council. In the United Kingdom, too, since 2010 at the latest, a range of funding from the Research Council (RCUK) has been available for research, which is often referred to here as "action research". In addition to research initiatives, this funding also promotes the training and establishment of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research groups (Lyall et al. 2015). The European Union is also becoming increasingly involved and explicitly promotes transdisciplinary research approaches. Participatory co-design approaches were used to shape the Horizon Europe 2021-2027 programme in order to involve citizens and scientists in the process.

Since 2019, discussions in national communities on the design of participatory and transdisciplinary research (Lyall et al. 2015; Grunwald et al. 2020; Pohl et al. 2021; White Paper 2025) – also against the backdrop of rapidly growing demand and institutionalisation that is not keeping pace (Paulsen & Kueffer 2023) – have been brought together in the newly founded Global Alliance for Inter- and Transdisciplinarity based in Bern (Klein 2021).

In this conceptually, methodologically and institutionally dynamic field, the IRS can make a specific contribution with its focus on social science and contemporary historical spatial research and strengthen the dialogue between spatial perspectives and findings as well as participatory and transdisciplinary approaches, which has been very sporadic to date. This is because spatial research as a whole can point to a long tradition of close cooperation with practitioners. On the one hand, this is due to the integrative perspective in the analysis of spaces, whose development is always driven by multiple, mutually influencing forces – social, economic, ecological and political-planning – which require analytical separation and synthesising consolidation. On the other hand, large parts of planning and development practice also show an affinity for science. The "transfer culture" at the IRS builds on this tradition of cooperation between research and practice. In our view, a particular contribution of the IRS is that it not only works with experts from politics, administration and planning – as the Academy for Spatial Development (ARL) does successfully, for example – but also

involves civil society initiatives, grassroots movements and social enterprises in its research. These actors often have few institutional resources for scientific advice.

This reorientation of science has been reflected at the IRS in recent years in various forms and with different thematic focuses, formats and methods. Transdisciplinary and citizen science projects have already been carried out in all research areas. Working with society is therefore already common practice at the IRS.

The following challenges were primarily investigated as part of the participatory and transdisciplinary research at the IRS:

- the structural change-induced dismantling of infrastructure in peripheral, especially rural regions (SOIR),
- migration-related changes in the coordination tasks of administrations in the areas of neighbourhood development and local integration policies (SatdtumMig I and II),
- the ecologically driven transformation of political and administrative work (ExTRass),
- Historical research drew on collective experiences and knowledge about social and spatial developments (CitizenArchives).

On the one hand, a wide range of projects have already provided extensive experience with transdisciplinary and participatory research and working methods. These include aspects such as

- the organisation of transdisciplinary teams and the design of communication and cooperation processes,
- the development of a common understanding of problems and research questions,
- the design of transdisciplinary and participatory research processes,
- the development of context-related solutions,
- the development of joint publications,
- Reflecting on and measuring the effectiveness of developed solutions and their transferability.

On the other hand, due to project-related funding logic, the expertise acquired has only been partially reflected upon and transformed into systematic knowledge, and has so far only occasionally been transferred into scientific contributions to the further development of participatory and transdisciplinary research itself (e.g. Ammaturo and Schmidt 2024; Schmidt and Stadermann 2023; Daldrup et al. 2022). Knowledge stocks are also linked to volatile networks of civil society and municipal actors as well as to individual researchers.

In summary, the developments outlined in the international research field and the research experience at the IRS allow us to conclude the following for the further development of the scientific system:

- 1.) Participatory and transdisciplinary working methods have gained legitimacy and are credited with qualities such as a more comprehensive, holistic understanding of problems or more far-reaching problem-solving capacities, which are urgently needed in current social developments but are increasingly less available from conventional, discipline-specific

research. This is triggering strong pressure for change in a research landscape whose resources are unlikely to expand in the foreseeable future and may even have to be reduced. Well-informed research policy and strategic priorities are therefore necessary.

- 2.) Participatory, but especially transdisciplinary work differs greatly from classical disciplinary research. For example, new epistemological problems arise, as do unresolved methodological questions of knowledge acquisition and the evaluation of research results and achievements, but also new challenges for career planning and research ethics. At the same time, transdisciplinary research requires disciplinary research as a central ingredient. This raises questions for individual research institutions and the research system as a whole as to how participatory and transdisciplinary working methods can be institutionally integrated into the existing structure (while at the same time being distinguished from it), and how one can be promoted without neglecting the other.
- 3.) Due to its specific nature, spatial social research has extensive experience in close cooperation with social actors, which gives it a potentially leading role in this area. However, due to its relatively small weight within the overall science system, this "experience advantage" has not yet been exploited and capitalised on. While established social forces such as politics, administration and the economy already have a wide range of opportunities to cooperate with science, this has so far only been possible to a very limited extent for civil society initiatives. Here, too, spatial social research and contemporary spatial research, not only at the IRS, have experience and contact networks whose expansion and development could mitigate this imbalance.

## 1.2 Overarching objectives of the research programme

The research programme pursues various interrelated objectives – both at the scientific level and with regard to institutional consolidation, knowledge transfer and network building.

### *Scientific objectives*

1. Reaching an understanding of the core concepts of transdisciplinary and participatory working methods – in contrast to concepts already established at the IRS such as (dialogical) knowledge transfer, transfer culture and science communication
2. Creation of a space for testing, experimenting and further developing formats and methods of transdisciplinary and participatory collaboration with practitioners
3. Synthesising experience and knowledge on transdisciplinary and participatory theoretical approaches, working methods and research methods
4. The knowledge developed and newly acquired in the research programme is actively incorporated into scientific communities. In this process, knowledge generated in a participatory and transdisciplinary manner is fed into debates relevant to the IRS's field of expertise, but the aim is also to contribute to methodological and conceptual debates on participatory and transdisciplinary research.

5. Participatory and transdisciplinary findings are incorporated into the classic products of scientific publishing, science communication and knowledge transfer. However, the aim is also to develop new publication formats that appeal to new target groups.

#### *Institutional goals*

6. Institutional anchoring of the work experience gained from the research programme in the existing institute structure and culture.
7. An application currently under review for the establishment of a small strategic special unit aims to establish a new research unit at the IRS for transdisciplinary work – the "IRS Space of Possibilities". If successful, the content-related work on the research programme will accompany this project in a preparatory manner, or, if rejected, pave the way for alternative forms of institutionalisation.
8. Development and expansion of regional, national and international networks, communities and partnerships

In addition, the commitment to the Society for Transdisciplinary and Participatory Research (GTPF) will be continued – specifically in the formulation of positions 1. on the institutionalisation of transdisciplinary and participatory working methods in research and teaching, 2. on the development of evaluation criteria for review processes and funding programmes.

### **1.3 Working method: Synergy platform**

To implement the objectives of the research programme, a synergy platform on issues of transdisciplinary and participatory research will be established for a period of four years (2026 to 2029). It brings together the IRS research priorities, leading (inter)national scientists from the field of transdisciplinary and participatory research, and practitioners. The platform itself consists of various event and exchange formats, thus creating a space for reflection on collaborative work processes, methods and the interpretation of results. It is jointly operated by all three research priorities and supported by a scientist for cross-priority research and transdisciplinarity as well as the Science Support and Communication (WUK) department.

Cooperation within the research programme takes place primarily through a *series of international forums* (section 1.3.1) and through the *testing of transdisciplinary working formats* (section 1.3.2).

#### *1.3.1 International forums*

This format of cross-focus collaboration aims to achieve the scientific and methodological goals of the research programme through exchange between the research priorities, with leading international experts and with the practice partners involved in the research. The international forums take place twice a year, with a total of eight events serving to enhance the qualifications of the staff. *All members of the lead project teams* regularly participate in the international forums. They are

organised on a rotating basis by one of the research focus areas. At the same time, they are openly offered as continuing education events for all IRS employees and proactively advertised.

The forums focus on the complex nature of participatory and transdisciplinary research in thematic sessions, each of which is designed and enriched by internationally renowned experts. The topics will be planned in 2026. Possible topics include: Commonalities and distinctions between citizen science, interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity, and between participatory research formats and methods; discussion of relevant terminology and conceptual approaches to civil society, transformation knowledge and practices, and visualising the future; examination of the organisation of co-creative and co-productive processes, challenges in research ethics, and (inter)national experiences with the institutionalisation of transdisciplinary and participatory research and collaboration.

In preparation for the forums, the staff member for "Cross-disciplinary Research and Transdisciplinarity at the IRS" offers a monthly open reading seminar on texts related to transdisciplinary and participatory research.

### 1.3.2 Testing transdisciplinary working formats

The **think tank** will be carried out with a selected network of civil society actors and practitioners. One event will serve to provide information and facilitate joint critical discussion of the planned development of transdisciplinary and participatory research at the IRS. A second event will be used as a test run for joint work on current social challenges. This will involve testing the joint, i.e. academically and non-academically inspired, description and characterisation of the challenges, the joint formulation of work and research questions, and the outlining of research projects. The events will either mark the start of the establishment of the IRS opportunity space or will be tested and evaluated with regard to their establishment without funding from the small special fund. A possible link with the IRS regional discussion (see section 2.6), which is to be further developed, will also be considered.

The **concept workshop** serves to further develop formats and tools for participatory and transdisciplinary research through collegial case consultation, coaching, constructive-critical evaluation of projects, and reflection on successful and failed processes. The employee responsible for cross-disciplinary research and transdisciplinarity will accompany or, if necessary, deepen the discussion and reflection on transdisciplinary and participatory approaches, formats and methods in bilateral exchanges and in the form of *sensitising visits* (Marguin & Knoblauch 2021) with the research priorities and flagship projects, and initiate their systematic review. The respective persons responsible for the modules for participatory and transdisciplinary research in the flagship projects will participate in the concept workshops, as well as selected employees from third-party funded projects.

### 1.3.3 Resources

In order to achieve the above-mentioned goals, the IRS can draw on various internal resources during the course of the research programme. These include, on the one hand, institute-funded human resources from the research priorities and the WUK and, on the other hand, synergies with ongoing third-party-funded research.

The *flagship projects of the research priorities* develop modules for participatory and transdisciplinary research that support the scientific and methodological objectives of the research programme, e.g. by testing working formats and/or research methods and sharing the experiences gained.

*Third-party funded projects* with participatory and transdisciplinary components carried out during the term of the research programme are given a context by the research programme that allows the experiences gained there to be reflected upon, to learn from each other, and to record project-specific learning effects for subsequent projects and make them available to other project teams. The use of collaborative formats of the Leibniz Association, in particular the experiences of the IRS in the *Leibniz Lab "Upheavals and Transformation"* (2024-2027), offer great potential here.

In addition, research from the previous bridge project "Disruption" is to be continued at the beginning of the research programme in order to secure and utilise its results. In doing so, it is possible to draw on participatory and transdisciplinary processes that have already been initiated and their current status.

With a research assistant for cross-focus research and transdisciplinarity (FS II) and a consultant for strategic networking and co-creation (WUK), the IRS has also built up *central institute-funded capacities* that support researchers in achieving the scientific and methodological objectives of the research programme.

## 2. Structural objectives

As part of its 2026–2029 research programme, the IRS is pursuing structural objectives in the areas of personnel development for early-career researchers, external networking and internal cooperation, international visibility, transfer culture and third-party funding strategy. These structural objectives are intertwined. It is therefore particularly important to the IRS that the measures and strategies are coordinated across the various subject areas and support each other.

Against the backdrop of scientific and methodological advances within the research programme, the IRS's mission is to be updated. In addition, ways are to be found to integrate participatory and transdisciplinary research into the organisational structures of the IRS in the best possible way.

Specifically, the following measures are planned:

- Revision of the IRS mission statement
- Revision of the third-party funding strategy and publication strategy
- Further development of the programme budget (and factual reports)
- Integration of international expertise on participatory and transdisciplinary research into the IRS Scientific Advisory Board
- Modified organisational chart of the IRS

### 2.1 Promotion of young scientists

The IRS sees itself as a place for training excellent junior scientists and acts in accordance with the guidelines of the Leibniz Association in promoting them. At the IRS, young researchers include both postdoctoral researchers who are in a qualification phase for further scientific or practice-related functions, as well as doctoral candidates with the qualification goal of obtaining a doctorate. By promoting young researchers, the Institute supports their professional and personal development and prepares them for careers and leadership positions within and outside of academia. In addition, the IRS supports its young researchers in intensifying their networking with the scientific community through stays at research institutions or lecture tours in Germany and abroad, as well as through participation in scientific training courses and summer schools. The IRS has established its proven support for young researchers in two works agreements for doctoral candidates and postdoctoral researchers, which it will modify as necessary.

To this end, this research programme provides human resources for two doctoral projects within the framework of the IRS's flagship research project. In addition, research groups at the IRS are usually allocated a postdoctoral position, where they initially acquire qualifications as project managers, it is possible to obtain further academic qualifications that qualify individuals for both professorial appointments and management positions outside academia.

## 2.2 National and international cooperation with university and non-university research

### *Collaborations with universities*

The IRS is part of a very diverse scientific region. We actively utilise this diversity and work together with universities in the Berlin-Brandenburg area on the basis of existing cooperation agreements, which, among other things, regulate the procedures for joint appointments. Joint appointments are initiated or continued on the basis of existing cooperation agreements with Humboldt University of Berlin, Brandenburg University of Technology Cottbus-Senftenberg, Free University of Berlin, Technical University of Berlin, University of Potsdam, and European University Viadrina, Frankfurt (Oder). Through its institutional links with neighbouring universities, the IRS is involved in university teaching and in supervising theses and doctoral students. This also gives rise to joint research projects.

In future, appointments to junior professorships and replacement appointments should be used to establish cooperation with additional partners. Instead of complex joint appointment procedures, more flexible forms of cooperation should increasingly be initiated, for example in the form of adjunct professorships or the granting of doctoral rights to junior research group leaders.

### *Joint research and collaborations within the Leibniz Association*

The IRS will continue to contribute its expertise to various forms of collaborative research and participate in sub-projects. Existing participations (including SFB 1265 "Re-Figuration of Spaces" and SFB TRR 294 "Structural Change of Property") will be continued and, if possible, intensified. The following initiatives are intended to broaden the basis for collaborative research:

- Establishment of a geographically distributed junior research group "Value and Evaluation of the New in Structural Change" in combination with the appointment of a W1 junior professorship for urban and regional sociology in a joint appointment by the IRS and BTU Cottbus-Senftenberg
- Joint appointment of a W2 professorship in "Urban and Regional Policy" with the University of Potsdam

The IRS will continue to actively participate in collaborative research within the **Leibniz Association**.

- Leibniz Lab "Upheavals and Transformations": The activities in the Leibniz Lab are of great importance, as they combine the central themes of the current bridge project " " (Disruption/Upheavals) with the theme of the present research programme (see Chapter 1).
- Leibniz Research Alliance "Value of the Past": Since 2021, the IRS has been collaborating with 20 other institutes in the Leibniz Research Alliance "Value of the Past". In the new funding phase (until 09/2029), the network will address the value of the past in the context of current debates on climate change and biodiversity, the postcolonial responsibility of the Western world, and the use of the past in the rise of right-wing populism and right-wing radicalism.

- Leibniz Research Network R – Spatial Knowledge for Society and the Environment (Leibniz R for short): The IRS is actively involved in setting the agenda for the research network and acts as publisher of the interdisciplinary peer-reviewed journal *Raumforschung und Raumordnung / Spatial Research and Planning*.

### *Internationalisation*

The IRS maintains institutional partnerships with the University of Manchester (Department of Geography at the School of Environment, Education and Development), the University of Leicester (Centre of Urban History – School of History, Politics and International Relations), Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan, the University of Turku and the University of Eastern Finland. These partnerships support low-threshold staff mobility (through reciprocal access to mobility programmes) and the initiation of international joint research projects. In addition, the IRS collaborates with numerous other partner institutions in project consortia funded by EU research programmes as well as bi- or multinational and German programmes. The IRS maintains a mobility programme that enables visiting scholars to conduct research stays at the IRS. As part of its efforts to promote young researchers, it supports its employees' stays abroad in qualification projects.

The IRS's internationalisation strategy will be critically reviewed during the course of the research programme and revised as necessary. In doing so, the IRS will pay particular attention to the further development of its own event formats, international collaborative research and the hosting of events for international research networks at the IRS. Furthermore, the internationalisation of the Scientific Advisory Board and the promotion of a broadly practised working culture of bilingualism within the institute are planned. In addition to strategy development and strategic priorities, the IRS also sees internationalisation as a cross-cutting issue that can be promoted in all other structural objectives. New emphases on increasing international visibility can therefore also be found in the other subchapters of Chapter 2.

## **2.3 Transfer culture**

The work at the IRS is supported by a transfer culture that sees the transfer and communication of knowledge as a natural and integral part of the research process. In this way, science and practice meet on an equal footing and interact in dialogue and for mutual benefit. It also supports the scientific qualification and career development of researchers who work in practice or with practice. Researchers proactively advise stakeholders from politics, administration and civil society on request. To this end, they use a variety of formats tailored to the target audience. Transfer formats are continuously developed by the IRS.

Participatory and transdisciplinary research at the IRS has grown out of this transfer culture. With the overarching theme of this research programme, the aim is now to further develop the established transfer culture in order to jointly reflect on forms of participatory and transdisciplinary research across projects and research priorities and to professionalise the corresponding working techniques and research methods.

In deepening the transfer culture of the IRS, another focus is on identifying and utilising potential dialogue target groups in practice, transfer messages and communication opportunities more consistently and at an earlier stage in research projects. Furthermore, these aspects are to be considered at an even earlier stage, during the application consultation process, and integrated into project implementation through a more standardised process. This is supported by the research funding officer, who works in the WUK (Science Support and Communication) team. In addition to press and public relations work, the WUK will continue to develop suitable formats for dialogue with practitioners and implement them in cooperation with researchers. Future developments in technical infrastructure, such as the IRS website, will address the requirements of the transfer culture.

Due to its research topics, the IRS maintains numerous contacts with partners in practice at the municipal and regional level as well as at the federal state level. In order to make the scaling and transferability of its consulting services even more effective, one of the strategic objectives of this research programme is to address the interaction between overarching, national and supranational policies and the local and regional levels in a more targeted manner, for example through the thematic design of event and consulting formats and the targeted addressing of multipliers and programme designers at these levels.

## 2.4 Third-party funding strategy

The IRS's third-party funding strategy provides for a high degree of flexibility and therefore sets few requirements. These include a fixed target quota of 21% of the total budget to be raised through third-party funding. In addition, the amount paid annually to the DFG should at least be recouped through DFG funding. In the 2024 evaluation, the target quota of 21% was considered relatively low for a Leibniz institution and could be increased. To this end, more ambitious targets will be developed and implemented in consultation with the committees during the course of the research programme.

The high degree of flexibility afforded by the deliberately open-ended targets allows the IRS to pursue the strategic goals of the research programme even more effectively by attracting third-party funding. In the main areas of research, third-party funded projects are intended to deepen, expand or complement the flagship project research " ". In addition, it is also possible to use successfully acquired third-party funding to develop or explore new research topics and to promote their subsequent institutionalisation.

The IRS also promotes risky research, provided that it promises exceptional advances in knowledge or transfer impacts. This is also reflected in its third-party funding strategy, which deliberately provides for repeated applications to highly competitive but equally prestigious international programmes, such as those in the context of the ERC.

In addition, the IRS aims to gain international reputation and visibility through third-party funding, increase academic output and achieve transfer results. Furthermore, the IRS is expanding its opportunities to achieve structural objectives, for example by acquiring additional positions for staff to supervise doctoral and postdoctoral students or by offering early-career researchers opportunities for independent research (e.g. through junior research groups). Collaborations with universities are to be used to initiate joint research projects. The IRS uses externally funded international projects to

increase the international visibility of its research, but also to provide consulting services in inter- and supranational contexts (e.g. European Commission). Finally, external funding at the IRS is used to implement equality policies, further develop research infrastructures, acquire or produce data sets, and support the implementation of its open access strategy.

## 2.5 Internal cooperation

The research priorities form long-term, stable, broad fields of expertise that enable specialisation, profiling and division of labour as well as interdisciplinary cooperation. At this level, the portfolio of institute- and externally funded research projects is strategically managed, subject-specific transfer strategies are implemented, internal cooperation is organised, and personnel development is ensured. The topics investigated by the research priorities overlap in some areas, creating opportunities for synergies across research priorities, for example at IRS events with a broad external impact (see section 2.6).

In addition to these informal opportunities for internal cooperation arising from the organisational structure, the IRS also organises internal cooperation in a targeted manner through the following formats:

### *Research Council*

The Research Council is the central internal advisory body to the Executive Board for all research-related issues. In addition to the Director, the heads of the research focus areas and the WUK management, the scientists of the third management level. At the meetings of the Research Council, which are held regularly five times a year (including one day-long closed meeting), research programmes, research strategies and management are discussed (e.g. the publication strategy, the third-party funding portfolio, the design of the transfer culture, but also the planning of science communication or internationalisation measures) and their implementation is monitored. Furthermore, important project proposals are presented and evaluated in dialogue.

### *Doctoral colloquium*

As part of the structured support for doctoral students, the IRS holds a colloquium in which doctoral projects are discussed and evaluated and theories, methods and working techniques are taught. Doctoral students from all research areas participate in this format. The colloquium is led on an annual basis by various habilitated researchers from the IRS from all research areas.

## 2.6 Events

In addition to the above-mentioned event formats, which will be operated via the Synergy Platform in future, the events at the IRS are aimed at specific target groups and are, of course, primarily held for their external impact. At the same time, they always provide an opportunity for internal cooperation,

whether in joint planning and implementation or simply in mixed participation across research areas. The WUK supports the organisation of the research-related event series "IRS Spring Academy" (focus on internationalisation and promoting young talent), "IRS Lectures" (focus on internationalisation) and "IRS Seminars" (focus on internationalisation), as well as the "Brandenburg Regional Talks" (as part of the transfer culture at the IRS), which are geared towards social practice.

### *IRS Spring Academy*

The annual international "IRS Spring Academy" is aimed at researchers in the doctoral and early post-doctoral qualification phase. Under a theme that changes annually, which is developed under the leadership of one of the institute's three main research areas and implemented in collaboration with a regional partner from research or practice, an international group of 20-25 researchers in the early stages of their careers comes together for four days. They have the opportunity to present their research projects and develop them further through feedback and interactive formats such as doing research workshops and field trips, as well as engaging in direct exchange with leading international scientists.

The format thus contributes to the promotion of young scientists as well as to the international and interdisciplinary networking and visibility of the IRS. Further development is planned as part of the 2026-2029 research programme. Ideas include more interactive exchange formats between junior and senior researchers as well as with external, non-scientific actors – for example, in the form of a field trip as part of the event.

The main responsibility for the organisation lies with the WUK in close cooperation with a research focus and, if necessary, an external partner.

### *IRS Lectures and PhD Seminars*

The "IRS Lectures" bring internationally renowned scientists to the IRS for a guest lecture that is relevant to the IRS's research. The speakers report on their current research for 45-60 minutes. Each lecture is commented on by a discussant and then discussed in depth. The discussants are recruited from the IRS or invited from cooperating institutions. The lectures are offered and advertised in a hybrid format. This attracts external audiences beyond the institute and increases public visibility. The format also aims to bring new ideas to the IRS and generate broad resonance within the institute. Two lectures are held each year, one in the spring and one in the autumn. Each event is organised by one of the research focus areas in turn.

In addition to the public guest lecture, the speakers offer a seminar for IRS doctoral students, which contains thematic links for young researchers from all research areas and contributes to the active promotion of young researchers at the IRS. This "PhD Seminar" offers IRS doctoral students the opportunity to learn about and deepen their knowledge of current theoretical approaches and to gain inspiration for their own research work. At the same time, it offers doctoral students the opportunity to network with renowned scientists.

### *IRS Workshops*

The flexible and open-ended format of the "IRS Workshops" offers nationally and internationally renowned or up-and-coming scientists the opportunity to present their research and discuss it with IRS scientists. The format itself is flexible, i.e. the duration and interactivity vary and depend on the speakers and the research areas to which they are linked. The format aims to enrich internal discussion. The workshops can be conducted by guest researchers at the IRS, but can also be offered as part of projects within the individual research areas.

### *Brandenburg Regional Discussions*

An established format for the transfer of knowledge between science and practice is the biannual "Brandenburg Regional Discussions". The aim of the format is to promote dialogue and exchange between science and experts from politics, administration, business, culture and civil society on topics relating to spatial and social developments in Brandenburg. IRS scientists contribute their findings and, where appropriate, recommendations for action from their own research, while experts from the field contribute their own experiences from their areas of activity. A moderated exchange takes place between practitioners, scientists and the audience, with everyone on an equal footing. On the one hand, the format offers excellent opportunities for knowledge transfer and dissemination into practice. On the other hand, it opens up a space for dialogue between science and practice, in which both sides can meet on equal terms with their perspectives and expertise and learn from each other.

In future, the format is to be made more flexible in terms of form and implementation. Possible options include cooperation with partners from the field in the state of Brandenburg and holding the event at thematically appropriate locations outside the institute. The format thus offers a wide range of opportunities for a transdisciplinary understanding of science, e.g. by attracting partners from the field for joint projects or raising awareness of practical needs in the development of scientific questions and research designs.

The events are designed and organised in collaboration between the WUK and one of the research focus areas.

### 3. Research focus "Economy and Civil Society"

#### 3.1 Profile of the research focus

The research focus "Economy and Civil Society" examines how spaces are used, created and changed through social action. The research focuses on innovative and creative dynamics in transformation processes, which are often influenced by crises and shaped by economic and civil society actors. It takes into account value attributions and their negotiation, devaluation processes, power asymmetries and intersectional inequalities, as well as the sometimes conflictual interplay between entrepreneurial and sustainability-oriented logics of action.

The aim is to better understand socio-economic transformation processes in a digitally mediated society at the regional and trans-regional level and the challenges associated with them, and to influence them through partially transdisciplinary research approaches. The researchers investigate the spatial and social emergence and diffusion of new ideas, alternative forms of economic activity and distributed working practices. They explore digitally mediated socially sustainable innovations produced by economic, civil society, political and administrative actors. Another focus is on the spatial characteristics of the negotiation of social, ecological and economic values. In addition, they examine knowledge orders and practices of remembering and forgetting in border regions. They predominantly use qualitative research methods as well as quantitative-qualitative combinations of methods and consider the topics from an actor-centred and spatio-temporal perspective.

Following an interactive understanding of knowledge transfer, the research focus shapes sustainable socio-economic transformation processes together with social actors. The aim is to enable actors to develop strategies for overcoming challenges in local, regional and supra-regional processes of change in times of multiple crises. The collaboration involves city and regional planners, administrations and political actors at all spatial scales. The work is aimed at decision-makers in politics, business, civil society, administration and science at the local to supranational level.

#### 3.2 Profiles of the research groups

*Research group "Creativity and Work" (Head: Prof. Dr. Suntje Schmidt)*

The research group is interested in the contribution of creative social innovation processes to socio-economic change in urban and rural regions. Such as demographic change and climate change contribute to the increasing complexity of global-local interdependencies in digitally mediatised contexts. This dynamic is reflected in societal challenges and is changing translocal economic and social interactions. Against this backdrop, the research group examines civil society and entrepreneurial approaches to dealing with uncertainties, disruptions and diverging visions of the future in creative and innovative processes. In doing so, it explores collaborative, sometimes conflictual negotiations of value attributions in these processes and investigates new forms of translocal action. A particular focus is placed on the transformation of work and the world of work,

whereby work goes beyond gainful employment to include care practices, reproductive work and other forms of unpaid work. At the same time, alternative forms of organisation such as collectives, cooperatives and associations at the interface between market and non-market logics are becoming the focus of research. The aim is to develop options for action for open regional innovation and economic policies. The research contributions are predominantly located in economic and social geography, but are interdisciplinary in nature. Where appropriate, the research projects are organised on a transdisciplinary basis.

*Junior Research Group "Borders and Memory" (Head: Dr Vivien Sommer)*

The junior research group is dedicated to investigating knowledge orders, memory cultures and spatial figurations in social transformation processes. The group combines perspectives from spatial theory, the sociology of knowledge and memory theory. Based on the Emmy Noether Junior Research Group "The Socio-Spatial Memory of European Borders," a central focus is on the role of borders as reference points for collective knowledge orders relating to past events. The group investigates how the social memory of past border shifts and confrontations manifests itself in the living environments of today's border regions. Another research focus deals with digital planning processes and the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in the refiguration and figuration of places in the sense of place constructions. As part of a planned subproject of a collaborative research centre, the group is investigating how AI-supported processes are changing the spatial order, planning and symbolic construction of place identity in urban and rural areas. A third, forward-looking project deals with the development of memory systems for challenges that extend far into the future, using the example of nuclear waste. The focus here is on the question of how future societies can be informed about invisible, potentially dangerous infrastructures over centuries. The research group is thus contributing to the further development of a social science research field that deals with the spatial dimensions of knowledge, memory and spatial design.

*Junior Research Group "Value and Evaluation in Structural Change" (led by N.N.)*

The distributed junior research group "Value and Evaluation in Structural Change" at the BTU Cottbus-Senftenberg and Erkner locations is investigating the complex socio-spatial dynamics of evaluating novelty in the context of regional transformation processes. It deals with social initiatives, activities and collective action at the interface between normative goals (e.g. for shaping structural change processes, expressed for example in mission-oriented policies) and creative, innovative social endeavours. The " " junior research group focuses, for example, on processes of negotiating value attributions and evaluations of novelty that aim to achieve a social "impact". Similarly, the multi-layered and complex forms of impact are to be reconstructed in the research work. The junior research group offers young scientists the opportunity to raise their profile with the possibility of a permanent W2 professorship. In addition, the group provides a framework for doctoral students to complete their qualifying work.

### 3.3 Flagship project "Caring – Valuating – Transitioning"

**Project team:** Prof. Dr. Suntje Schmidt, Jonathan Hussels, Valentin Mühlich, Antonia Nähring, N.N.

**Keywords:** Diverse Economies, Sustainable Transition Studies, Valuation, Care, Transformation

#### a) Problem outline

In Berlin's Treptow-Köpenick district, the "Sorge ins Parkcenter" initiative is working to convert a vacant shopping centre into a neighbourhood care centre. Its vision is to organise diverse forms of non-capitalised care work – such as nursing, counselling and neighbourhood assistance – in a communal, democratic and local manner. The initiative is nationally networked and connects local actors, organisations and counselling centres to build a place of shared care as a solidarity-based care model outside of market logic. It emphasises the importance of informal and formal care networks, participatory self-administration and the development of shared values as a socially supportive, non-commercial practice in the form of its mission statement: "[...] strengthen society as a community and combat individualism. We want to promote reproductive and resilience work and recognise mutual dependence and vulnerability. The aim is to create a meeting place for everyone. With our project, we want to achieve: a change in discourse, transformation and socio-ecological sustainability [...]".

This example illustrates how collective actors in times of polycrisis (Lawrence et al., 2024, also multiple crises (Biesecker & von Winterfeld, 2018)) **clearly position themselves with forward-looking missions** (in the sense of socio-ecologically normative goals and visions of the future such as equal opportunities or climate justice). They often practise alternative and mission-oriented forms of economic activity, social interaction and joint future planning in local niches, thereby changing spaces as a (re)action to systemic problems and inequalities. To implement their missions, they find forms of organisation (e.g. social enterprises, cooperatives, registered associations, etc.) that feed partial solutions into larger transformation processes (Bui, 2021; Avelino et al., 2019; Mazzucato, 2018).

The vignette above also outlines how non-commercial actors take on **socially supportive (care) work** through collaborative action at the local level (Nelson 2025) and initiate change by caring for their environment and taking concrete action on the ground. In its quest to shape a sustainable future, the initiative specifically occupies and reconfigures physical **space**. At the same time, it opens up further spaces for action (and possibilities) for other actors to develop alternative solutions in individual niches and enter into a **negotiation process** with their environment. However, both the development of visions for the future (e.g. in missions) and the implementation and enforcement of innovative approaches are associated with internal and external, sometimes conflicting, valuation processes (Huguenin and Jeannerat, 2017 ; Jeannerat, 2024). (Changing) members of the initiative are in a constant process of negotiation about the goals and also the ways to achieve them. Supporters and allies outside the organisation must be mobilised and conflicts of interest regarding spatial arrangements must be resolved.

In order to examine the impact of mission-oriented organisations and the implementation (or non-implementation) of sustainable, innovative solutions in the context of major transformations, and to enable a better understanding of the complex interrelationships of change processes, transition

research (*Sustainability Transition Research*, STR) offers an insightful framework with its multi-dimensional phase model (Binz et al., 2025). Transition describes a systemic transition as a goal-oriented process, while transformation stands for a more profound upheaval of interrelated systems.

In our view, STR can benefit from a stronger focus on processes of valuation and devaluation and their negotiation across different social actors (Schaafsma et al., 2023). This also includes a clearer consideration of cross-scale spatial dynamics in these processes (Levin-Keitel et al., 2018; Truffer et al., 2015; Furnaro, 2023). Bui et al. (2016) also see the collective development and communication of visions of the future as one of the most important connecting practices between niche innovations and the regime level, thus opening up a new, hitherto little-noticed field for STR. Such an approach can better illustrate how market and non-market practices of formal and informal organisations are actively transformed into "value" in order to shape change (Geels, 2002; Geels & Schot, 2007; Köhler et al., 2019).

The flagship project examines how mission-oriented organisations influence transition processes through local initiatives. Using a multi-level perspective, different scales and their spatial relationships are analysed. The project tracks how innovations and alternative solutions are implemented, under what conditions values are negotiated at different organisational and spatial levels, and how they gain legitimacy. In addition, spatial configurations and the spatio-temporal consequences for the interaction between mission-oriented organisations and their environment are to be identified.

### *b) Research questions*

The first of a total of three sets of questions aims to understand the conditions and spatio-temporal dynamics of value negotiation and formulation in mission-oriented organisations. In doing so, the organisations' visions of the future (e.g. in the form of missions and visions) are reflected along the course of organisational development and active practices in space are considered. Particular attention is paid to the thematic focus (e.g. climate, water, social participation, etc.) addressed by the organisations through care and responsibility ("caring"). The empirical work aims to identify the tension between collective visions of the future and valuation processes in the context of the constitutive conditions and the spatial implications.

**Research question 1: How and under what relational-spatial conditions does the negotiation of values and visions of the future take place in mission-oriented organisations and what influence does it have on their development?**

- What role does the collaborative development of visions of the future play in this?
- How do continuous value and valuation processes influence the (further) development of mission-oriented organisations?

The second set of questions relates to the interrelationship between the context in which mission-oriented organisations operate and the development of the organisations themselves. The aim is to identify how resistance or support structures are dealt with and to work out what influence these have on change processes. The focus is on negotiations, power structures and practices, as well as the mutual influence of the actors.

**Research question 2: In what contexts do mission-oriented organisations operate and how do they interact with each other?**

- How do mission-oriented organisations react to resistance and opposition actors?
- What (strategic) connections and networks are established in the process – and what possible connections are deliberately (?) ignored?
- How does the context of action influence the development of mission-oriented organisations?

Finally, the third set of questions focuses on how spaces that stimulate exchange and links between niche and regime can be changed and shaped (*spaces of possibility*).

**Research question 3: How can spaces of possibility be designed as connecting structures within transitions?**

- How are future-oriented values mobilised and challenged or linked to value registers at the regime level?
- What are some national and international examples of spaces of possibility?
- What constellations of actors, methodological and spatial requirements are associated with them?

c) *Theoretical approaches*

Innovation processes generate economic, social and scientific innovations through interactive, social and spatial processes. They are spatially and temporally mobile and often arise in multi-local contexts (Hautala and Ibert, 2018; Christmann et al., 2020; Hassink et al., 2020). The exploitation of innovative ideas often goes hand in hand with the emergence of new organisations (e.g. start-ups, associations, social enterprises, cf. Richter et al., 2020; Cohendet et al., 2021; Mayer and Lazzeroni, 2022; Cuntz and Peuckert, 2023; Thewes et al., 2024). Until now, research has focused on questions about the conditions under which new knowledge emerges and becomes established. Less attention has been paid to the associated processes of valuation and devaluation, the negotiation and enforcement of value attributions to new things, and the associated power asymmetries and practices of participation (or exclusion) of actors in these processes (Ibert et al., 2019; Barendregt et al., 2024).

In the context of polycrisis and conflicting visions of the future, forms of organisation are increasingly emerging that advocate for a **sustainable future** through "future making" (Krämer 2019). Discourses on alternative economic forms (Gibson-Graham, 2008), common goods (Ostrom, 2015; Rigos-Zitthen and Kapitsinis, 2024; Liodaki, 2024) or post-growth economies (Tschumi et al., 2020; Lange et al., 2020) show how mission-oriented organisations struggle for creative power in uncertain futures. Little is known about how the negotiation of values within organisations influences the organisational emergence and establishment process (Barinaga, 2023).

Innovation processes and mission-oriented organisations usually shape spatial transformation processes at the local level. How the processes of valuation and devaluation flow into transformations has not yet been extensively researched. **Sustainable transition research** offers starting points for this (Geels & Schot, 2007; Köhler et al., 2019) in their quest to better understand the transition from niche (innovation) to transitions at the regime and landscape level. However, their focus on individual transition systems and their neglect of spatial dynamics have been repeatedly criticised (Bui, 2021; Binz et al., 2020; Fischer & Newig, 2016; Köhler et al., 2019). Furthermore,

addressing power and (strategic) opposition to alternative transformative approaches is a field that has received little attention to date (Binz et al., 2025).

The **social and spatial construction of value and valuation processes** serves as a cross-cutting perspective. Valuation can be understood as a social, interactive practice in which actors, processes, things or innovations are assigned (or depreciated) values based on views (preferences), valuation infrastructures ("judgement devices", Karpik, 2010), knowledge and assertiveness (Harvey & Kou, 2013; Berthoin Antal et al., 2015; Aspers, 2021; Thomsen and Hess, 2022; Aspers & Dobeson, 2024; Schwanen, 2024; Jeannerat, 2024; Hussels et al., 2024). The relational nature of these processes in a spatiotemporal context offers potential for better understanding the relationship between valuation and transitions and the connections between niches and regimes (Berthoin Antal et al., 2015; Melchior, 2019; Ibert et al., 2019; Jeannerat, 2024).

The research process is based on a **relational-reconstructivist understanding of space**. According to this understanding, space is changed, shaped and created through the open, dynamic interaction of actors, things and practices (Löw, 2016). Value attributions, power relations and negotiation processes are integral components of space production (Massey, 2001; Taylor, 2024). The relationality of space makes it possible to analyse innovation and transition processes as multi-layered, cross-location developments shaped by social dynamics.

#### *d) Methods*

The flagship project will be developed empirically using **comparative and contrasting case studies** (national and, where appropriate, international) with a **combination of qualitative methods** (Yin, 2017) in order to answer the research questions in appropriate depth.

#### **Case study selection**

The research focuses on mission-oriented organisations such as the "Sorge im Parkcenter" initiative, the "Polyklinik Syndikat" association, and collective enterprises that actively transform (obsolete or contested) spaces. The specific cases have not yet been determined and will be identified during the preparatory phase through systematic literature research and exchanges with practitioners in the field. First, a thematic narrowing will take place, e.g. care work, economic and ecological sustainability. In addition, "responsibility" and collective action will be operationalised in organisational forms such as collective enterprises, non-profit cooperatives, associations or cooperatives. We assume that somewhat established organisations (existing for at least 5 years) will be included in the study in order to take into account existing experience in negotiating and enforcing values in change processes. Depending on external funding sources, among other things, international comparisons are planned, for example in France or Spain. The respective political, cultural and institutional conditions – in Spain (decentralised) and France (centralised) – have produced strong civil society structures with established cooperative networks in France and a strong tradition of solidarity-based economics, as well as self-organised care networks in (northern) Spain as examples of mission-oriented forms of organisation, which promise insightful comparable cases.

## Data collection and analysis

- **Document/media analyses** (e.g. statutes, mission statements or manifestos) to identify future visions and the values manifested therein by mission-oriented organisations.
- **Semi-structured and organisational biographical interviews** to reconstruct the spatio-temporal development dynamics of the organisations (Butzin & Widmaier, 2016; Müller & Ibert, 2015) and the associated evaluation and negotiation processes.
- **spatial-temporal axes** (Heinrich et al., 2021) and **focused ethnography** to identify critical moments and phases of evaluation and devaluation in space (Hutter & Stark, 2015; Carvalho & van Winden, 2018).
- **Futuring workshops** (Hajer & Pelzer, 2018; Neuhoff et al., 2023) as an interactive method for presenting (desirable) future scenarios together with research participants
- **Participatory observation** (Schiek, 2024) and **hybrid mapping methods** (Baxter et al., 2025) as accompanying observational methods
- **Regime network diagrams** for the representation of external connections based on actor-network theory.
- Through the combination of qualitative methods, we expect to make a new contribution to the methodology of transdisciplinary social and spatial research. The multiple data sets will first be evaluated using interpretative-comprehending methods ( ). Interview participants will also be included in the analysis through interactive workshops.

### e) Work phases

During the **one-year preparatory phase**, the theoretical foundations and the state of research will be further developed in order to sharpen the research questions. This sharpening will be accompanied by the identification of potential cases for the empirical phase and the initiation of contacts and initial access to the field. In addition, the systematic review of the state of research serves to prepare the interview guidelines and observation protocols. The joint conceptual and methodological work also expands the interdisciplinary exchange between the three research groups.

During the **data collection phase**, data is collected for the comparative case studies (media analyses, interviews, observations, futuring workshops, mappings, diagrams). Where possible, data collection will be expanded internationally. Theoretical and methodological reflection on the research approach will take place during the data collection process. Initial empirical results will be incorporated into a scientific publication.

In the **evaluation phase**, the collected data is systematically analysed in line with the research approach described above. The data types from the survey methods outlined above (qualitative and visual) are processed, synthesised and compared. Documents and interview transcripts are inductively coded and supplemented by observations, mappings and diagrams. The data will then be compared step by step, first in comparison with the national case studies and then in contrast to the possible international cases. In the interpretation of the data, these will be linked to the theoretical framework of STR from a valuation perspective and discussed in relation to transitions. At the same time, interim results will be discussed with research participants and interpreted jointly.

### Participatory transfer modules accompanying the project ("Working with society")

The entire research process is accompanied by intensive collaboration with the research field. Towards the end of the preparatory phase, participatory modules are repeatedly implemented, such as:

- Future workshops for the creative development of visions of the future
- Workshops for the joint interpretation and classification of interim results and observations
- Practitioner workshop with representatives of regional development to classify the results with a view to designing spaces of possibility
- Interactive closing event to present the results, but also to jointly develop further steps, possibly towards complementary practical projects or for transfer to the IRS space of possibility for further transdisciplinary projects.

#### *f) Expected results and products/outcomes*

From a scientific perspective, we expect contributions to sustainable transitions from the spatial perspective of collective valuation processes and their embedding in STR. The research will provide new insights into sustainable transition processes, collective value negotiations, value-led forms of organisation, alternative economies and power relations in spatio-temporal actor constellations. Research on spatio-temporal innovation processes and social entrepreneurship will be recontextualised and expanded through a conceptual foundation of mission-oriented organisations. Through the STR research approach and via valuation processes and their spatial dynamics, the project will provide new impetus for human geography discourses and spatial research on devaluation and its spatial dimensions. The combination of this perspective with STR and the consideration of actors in alternative economies and the question of how they influence these negotiation processes and change will represent a new contribution to the scientific community.

As a further developed theoretical and methodological approach, the still insufficiently researched field of visions of the future at the interface with value and valuation processes will contribute to new insights. The combination of methods will complement exploratory contributions in the field of qualitative and visual methods of empirical social and spatial research and introduce a new methodology with the regime network diagram.

The flagship project also has an integrative function within the research focus. On a theoretical and conceptual level, the valuation perspective provides links to both the junior research groups "Borders and Memory" and "Value and Evaluation in Structural Change". Here, a fruitful exchange can be expected, both conceptually and empirically, on the role of value, evaluation, devaluation, conflicts and disputes in relation to the evaluation of memories or the negotiation of visions of the future in regions undergoing significant socio-economic structural change, such as Lusatia. There are also methodological synergies. Methods such as hybrid mapping, cartography and qualitative network analysis are implemented and further developed in various forms in the three research groups.

In addition, we expect a contribution to the proposed strategic expansion of the institute in the form of the IRS Opportunity Space. With the future workshops, the project creates a context for developing visions of the future in collaboration with social research participants. The flagship project collects examples of how mission-oriented organisations themselves create spaces of possibility for

the value-driven design of possible futures. These findings contribute to the IRS space of possibility concept workshop and thus expand the IRS's transdisciplinary methodology toolkit.

In terms of quantitative output, the project will result in seven journal papers, two policy papers and three cumulative dissertations with additional publications.

*g) Timetable for the flagship project*

|  | 2026 |    |     |    | 2027 |    |     |    | 2028 |    |     |    | 2029 |    |     |    |
|--|------|----|-----|----|------|----|-----|----|------|----|-----|----|------|----|-----|----|
|  | I    | II | III | IV |
| <b>Vorbereitungs- und Kontaktphasephase</b>  |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Aufarbeitung Forschungsstand   |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Identifikation Fälle   |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Pilotphase   |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| <b>Erhebungsphase</b>  |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Dokumentenanalyse  |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Interviews   |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Beobachtungen  |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Mapping  |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| <b>Analysephase</b>  |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| In-Case Analyse  |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Cross-Case Analyse   |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| <b>Projektbegleitende partizipative Transfermodule („Mit der Gesellschaft arbeiten“)</b> |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Futuring Workshops   |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Werkstätten  |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Interaktive Abschlussveranstaltung   |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| <b>Outputs</b>   |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Beteiligung Konferenzen  |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Wissenschaftliche Paper  |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Dissertation   |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Policy Paper   |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Drittmittelantrag  |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
|  |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     | 2  |

### 3.4 Qualification projects

*Doctoral projects (in alphabetical order)*

*Jonathan Hussels* was employed as a research assistant in the BMFTR project SOIR between October 2022 and September 2025. The dissertation project was developed from the project. He will move to the flagship project at the start of the new research programme in January 2026 in order to submit his doctoral thesis by December 2026. The doctoral project focuses on the negotiation and mobilisation of spatially and temporally dynamic (social) innovation processes. A particular focus is on rural areas and their specific characteristics in valuation processes. The doctoral thesis will be

defended in 2027 to complete the process. The work is supervised by Prof. Dr. Suntje Schmidt and is based at the Geography Department of Humboldt University in Berlin.

*Valentin Mühlich* has been a research assistant since March 2025, preparing for the flagship project in the IRS research programme 2026-2029. As is customary for institute-funded doctoral candidates, he will prepare an exposé for a doctoral project during his first year at the IRS. At the time of writing the research programme, it is still too early to name a specific project. Thematically, he is expected to focus on civil society "care networks" and their spatial implications, as well as contributions to transitions.

*Antonia A. Nährung* has been a research assistant in the flagship project "Post-Office" (2022-2025) since 01/2025. Based on existing data and analyses from the completed flagship project (Post-Office), she is developing initial ideas for her own doctoral project at the time of writing the research programme. As is customary for institute-funded doctoral candidates, she will prepare an exposé for a doctoral project during her first year at the IRS. A viable exposé for her doctoral thesis will be available in spring 2027.

### 3.5 Knowledge transfer

A total of seven specialist publications in internationally peer-reviewed journals and at least three active participations per project participant per year at a national or international specialist event (e.g. RSA 2026: Gothenburg, DKG 2027: Bonn and GCEG 2028: Rome) are planned. Furthermore, the research work will be incorporated into the scientific discourse of the STR, e.g. at the International Sustainability Transitions (IST) Conference (2028, 2029). In addition, the project will be thematically integrated into the annual IRS science communication channels.

In addition, dialogue formats will be organised to promote exchange with practitioners, e.g. in an IRS regional discussion, a futuring workshop, several workshops and a closing event (see section 1)e). The interactive exchange formats will be accompanied by two IRS dialogue/policy papers. In collaboration with the IRS's Science Support and Communication (WUK) department, research results are presented graphically and content is prepared in understandable language for various audiences. The expansion of the methodological and analytical repertoire to include visual methods promises to increase the transferability of specialist knowledge through graphic analyses and presentations. Multimedia formats, such as podcasts, will also be used to communicate results to practitioners.

## 4. Research focus: "Politics and Planning"

### 4.1 Profile of the research focus

This research focus analyses the political negotiation and planning of the social and spatial development of cities and regions. In particular, it examines the governance of increasingly uncertain, complex and ambiguous problem situations. The research is based on the observation that current developments such as the climate and housing crises, the financialisation of the real estate industry and global migration are causing political polarisation, protests and conflicts that are putting cooperative governance arrangements under increasing pressure. Through its research on common goods such as housing and urban infrastructure, as well as climate-neutral, climate-resilient and sustainable urban and regional development, the research focus contributes to a better understanding of the governance of cities and regions in multi-level systems. The knowledge transfer is aimed at policymakers and planning authorities, but also at energy and housing companies, associations and civil society organisations.

### 4.2 Profiles of the research groups

#### 4.2.1 Research group "Urban Development Policies"

The research group "Urban Development Policies" deals with the political negotiation and planning of urban development. The focus is on the local handling of global processes such as the financialisation of urban development processes, the growth of socio-spatial disparities and increased international migration. The starting point for the research is the diagnosis that the control capacities of cooperative, network-like and partnership-based arrangements in urban development are increasingly being called into question. The result is increasing conflict and growing instability in governance approaches and planning procedures. With its research, the group contributes to the further development of forms of governance in urban development policy and helps to improve the design of urban change.

#### 4.2.2 Research group "Local Climate Policy"

The Local Climate Policy research group investigates the prerequisites, scope and limitations of local sustainability and climate policies. It focuses on the options for action and control available to politicians and administrators, as well as the influence and scope for action of non-governmental actors, particularly civil society groups. In addition to the development, adaptation and implementation of climate and energy policy strategies and local experiments, the resulting conflicts are also examined. On the one hand, this includes (socio-ecological) conflicts of interest, for example between climate protection, climate change adaptation and other urban and regional development concerns. On the other hand, it also addresses transformation conflicts in times of increasing social polarisation and growing mistrust of politics and authorities, as well as their ability to resolve conflicts

and shape the future. Through its research, the research group contributes to a better understanding of spatial transformation processes and advises politicians, (planning) administrators and civil society groups in particular.

### 4.3 Flagship project "Urban Heat Transition"

**Project team:** *Lisa Vollmer, Matthias Bernt, Wolfgang Haupt, Inés Gartlinger, Paul Seidel, N.N. (postdoctoral researcher)*

**Keywords:** *housing policy, environmental policy, climate governance, financialisation*

#### a) Outline of the problem

"Help!!! I have Vonovia" and "Stock market speculation with our heating costs" is written on the signs held aloft by tenants of a Vonovia housing estate in Mariendorf Ost, Berlin, in January 2024 in the bitter cold. What brings the tenants out onto the streets are exorbitant additional heating cost payments of up to 9,000 euros per household. And they are not the only ones: throughout Germany, protests against high additional heating cost payments to Vonovia and other landlords took place in the winter of 2023/2024. Behind this is a political control element of the heating transition: so-called heat contracting. In theory, outsourcing responsibility for heat supply from landlords to heat contractors should lead to a faster and urgently needed decarbonisation of the heating infrastructure, for example by switching from gas central heating to district heating or heat pumps. In practice, however, outsourcing to heat contractors primarily leads to increased heating costs for tenants. Even if there is no actual switch from gas central heating to district heating – it is not required by law – the heating energy can still be billed as district heating. Furthermore, heating costs are not billed based on the actual cost of heat supply, but rather on a complicated formula that is based not only on the purchase price of energy, but also on volatile market prices. This formula allows heating contractors to charge high energy prices and pass them on to tenants. This is a profitable exploitation model – in the case of Vonovia, also for the landlord itself, as Vonovia is a shareholder in the heating contractor to which responsibility for the heating system has been outsourced. This example shows that political regulation pits social and ecological goals of housing provision against each other.

In fact, the two housing issues are inseparable: the question of the supply of affordable housing and that of climate-friendly construction and operation of housing are closely intertwined. Nevertheless, no solution is yet in sight for either housing issue: housing is becoming unaffordable for ever broader sections of the population. At the same time, the building sector in Germany accounts for around 35 per cent of final energy consumption and 30 per cent of CO2 emissions.

However, the two housing issues are not only often treated separately in political debates, but even seem to be in direct contradiction to each other. Energy-efficient renovation of the housing stock seems feasible only if housing costs are increased, while overcoming the housing crisis seems possible only if ecological standards are abandoned. This apparent conflict of objectives needs to be questioned. Only by taking an integrated view of the problem can solutions be found that take social and ecological concerns equally into account.

The socio-ecological housing issue outlined here is therefore closely linked to the discussion on ways and means of achieving a socio-ecological transformation (Bauriedl et al. 2021). Social-ecological transformation research refers to approaches that do not focus solely on achieving climate (neutrality) goals or the transition to sustainable economic models, as is sometimes the case in debates on the Great Transformation, but also take issues of social justice into account (Sommer 2022, Brand/Wissen 2017).

However, an integrated approach to the socio-ecological housing issue that meets this requirement has so far only been seen in its early stages, and the division into two separate housing issues can also be observed in research. There is no shortage of scientific publications that identify either a climate crisis or a housing crisis. However, climate and environmental policy aspects have received little attention in housing research to date, and when they have, it has often been as a contradiction to socio-political objectives, such as in debates on *green* or *low-carbon* gentrification (Anguelovski et al 2019, Bouzarovski et al 2018). Conversely, the central role of the building sector in reducing CO2 emissions is undisputed in social science climate research – yet at the same time, housing is essentially treated as a technical matter. Social and political-economic aspects of the ecological housing issue receive little attention here. As a result, an integrated consideration of the socio-ecological housing issue has so far only been attempted in science (Weißenmel/Wehrhahn 2024, Novy et al 2024, zu Ermgassen et al 2022, Knuth 2019). It is precisely such an integrated approach that could provide valuable impetus for the urgently needed socio-ecological transformation of housing provision. We see empirical and theoretical research gaps here that our flagship project can close.

For the flagship project, we would like to focus on one aspect of this socio-ecological housing issue, namely the "urban heat transition", thereby ideally integrating the expertise of our two research groups. We use this term to summarise two aspects that have mostly been discussed separately up to now:

1. *Decarbonisation of heating supply systems*: the conversion of heating infrastructure, i.e. primarily the conversion of gas central heating to district heating and heat pumps, as well as the operation of this (new and old) infrastructure with renewable energies.
2. *Energy efficiency of residential buildings*: In addition to decarbonising the heat supply, the total energy consumption for heating must be reduced. This requires the energy-efficient modernisation of residential buildings, i.e. façade insulation, pipe renovation, window replacement, etc.

The topic of urban heat transition not only breaks new scientific ground, but also offers the opportunity to work with practitioners to develop action strategies that address the housing and climate crises in an integrated manner rather than playing them off against each other. That is why the flagship project places a special focus on transdisciplinary work with society.

### b) Questions

We approach this developing field of research with open, overarching research questions that are specified in the individual modules:

- What implications does the intertwining of the housing and climate crises have for political governance?

- What socio-ecological conflicts of interest arise from the urban heat transition and how are these negotiated?
- What constellations of actors, interests and conflicts accompany the municipal heat transition?

We consider the following actors:

- End consumers (primarily tenants, and in some cases owner-occupiers)
- Municipal actors (administration, politics, municipal companies such as housing and utility companies)
- Private sector (housing and utility companies)

To answer these questions, we focus on three core areas:

1. At the horizontal level of municipal governance, politicians and administrators develop and implement strategies and plans for the urban heat transition and a climate-efficient housing sector. We are interested in the agency of the planning administration and the discrepancy between short-term political incentives for action and the long-term planning needs of the field.
2. In the area of political economy, we focus on ownership structures, business practices and distribution issues. We are particularly interested in: who owns the infrastructure for the heat transition, who owns the houses and the technical infrastructure? Who profits from the urban heat transition? Who pays for it? And what conflicts arise from this?
3. Finally, our flagship project also addresses the political framework conditions set at federal and EU level for the urban heat transition in a multi-level governance system. Here, we are interested in the negotiation processes and conflicts that arise at and between the different levels.

These three areas are embedded in the materiality and spatiality of the infrastructures for heat supply and housing provision. A socio-ecological transformation of housing and heat supply requires an integrated view of both institutional systems and their materiality.

### c) *Theoretical approaches*

The flagship project is based on three research approaches that are established in different scientific communities.

#### **Climate governance**

Climate governance refers to the intertwining of institutional regulations and laws from the global to the local level (Jänicke 2017). In urban research, human geography and political science, approaches are being discussed that deal with political and (urban) social negotiation processes in dealing with the climate crisis (climate protection and climate adaptation). The emergence of more flexible, decentralised and polycentric governance approaches – characterised by a multitude of shaping actors and the absence of central coordination – is discussed as a consequence of the perceived failure of climate protection agreements at the supranational and national levels (Turnheim et al.

2018; Ostrom 2010; Sabel and Victor 2022). These new governance approaches are characterised by open, exploratory, learning and adaptive approaches that respond to the complexity of social change processes and the associated uncertainties in contexts of transformative change (Grin et al. 2010). Another research approach focuses on interface problems, e.g. as a "nexus" between different infrastructures (Sander and Weißermel 2023; Monstadt and Coutard 2019) or their "cross-domain coordination" across different sectors (Monstadt et al. 2022).

### Approaches from housing research

Housing research contributes a political-economic perspective. It analyses the specific institutional framework of housing provision as a decisive variable for the social impacts of ecological conversion strategies. Contributions often emphasise the diversity of social impacts and highlight conflicts of interest between different social groups (e.g. Holm 2011, Großmann et al. 2017, Großmann 2019). Two research approaches are particularly relevant in this context. Firstly, (local) housing regime research, which understands the modes of housing provision established at a specific point in time and in a specific place as the result of negotiation processes (Ruonavaara 2020, Schönig and Vollmer 2020). From this perspective, we ask ourselves which actors with which interests are making housing provision more climate-friendly or preventing such a change. Secondly, housing research analyses differences in the management and utilisation strategies of different types of owners (cf. Kemeny 1981, Ball 1983, Aalbers 2016, Wijburg et al. 2020, Holm et al. 2023). An understanding of these different strategies is essential because, on the one hand, the various private, public and cooperative property owners are key players in the heat transition, but on the other hand, their business models dictate different courses of action. As a result, they are open to steering impulses to very different degrees.

### Planning theory and implementation research

A socio-ecological transformation of the heating infrastructure and housing supply is a highly demanding political process, for the analysis of which approaches from planning theory and political science implementation and governance research are helpful. While planning theory was strongly influenced by incrementalist planning approaches (Braybrook and Lindblom 1963, Ganser et al. 1993) and communicative planning paradigms (Healey 1997), the appropriateness of these perspectives is now increasingly being questioned in view of the necessary socio-ecological "great transformation" (Gailing et al. 2025), with calls for more controlling state intervention.

However, the competence of state actors to implement and execute major reform programmes has been viewed with scepticism in political science since the 1970s (cf. Pressman/Wildavsky 1973, Mayntz 1980 and 1983). Recently, this discussion has been supplemented in German-speaking countries by a debate on "administrative capacities" (e.g. Kuhlmann et al. 2023), which identifies factors that can explain the success or failure of the implementation of a political action programme.

The approaches described here are applied flexibly and tailored to the various modules (see below) through the pilot project. This enables contributions to theoretical discussions in specific *scientific communities* on the one hand, and places transdisciplinary work and policy advice on a broader scientific footing on the other. The mutual enrichment of theoretical approaches should be the result of the integration of the research directions.

## *d) Methods*

### **Research design**

Since the urban heat transition is a dynamically developing field of research, the flagship project is essentially exploratory in nature. The exact methodological approach is defined in the individual modules and continuously adapted.

Three empirical modules have already been defined, and further modules will be developed by staff yet to be recruited for the flagship project. Within the empirical modules, international comparisons with other European countries will be used to better identify the specifics of the German political framework, municipal governance and political economy of the urban heat transition, as well as to identify policy transfer and possible alternative approaches.

#### ***Module 1: Decarbonisation of the heating sector at the municipal level***

As the local implementation level for EU, federal and state guidelines, municipal activities relating to the heat transition are the central focus of the study. The interaction between the two areas of energy supply and urban development will be examined, as well as the coordination of urban and non-urban actors across sectors. In both areas, the public sector has limited financial and human resources and limited access to and varying control options in local governance arenas. This module therefore examines a) cross-sectoral coordination within municipalities; b) the expansion of municipal capacities through external expertise; c) the spatiality of different forms of control; and d) the resulting conflicts of interest. The starting point for the case studies is provided by the eight German cities participating in the EU mission "100 climate-neutral and smart cities by 2030", which, as pioneers in the field of climate protection, have already actively addressed the urban heat transition. Municipal heat planning, which is now mandatory, also allows for comparisons with cities that are taking a wait-and-see approach to climate protection.

#### ***Module 2: The heat transition as a business opportunity for housing companies***

This module examines how private, especially financialised housing companies are tapping into the urban heat transition as a business opportunity. Particular attention is paid to the social impacts, climate protection effects and spatial implications of the new utilisation strategies. Three areas are examined: a) the organisation of energy modernisation as a service (e.g. by Vonovia); b) the implications of heat contracting; c) conflicts over heating cost bills. Methodologically, the module relies on the evaluation of annual reports and press coverage, interviews with tenants, representatives of tenants' associations, housing companies and heat contractors, as well as political decision-makers, and the collection of quantitative data from digital legal advice tools.

#### ***Module 3: Political regulation of energy modernisation***

Module 3 consists of a policy analysis. The aim is to systematically examine how the "tenant-landlord dilemma" reflected in the political regulation of energy modernisation, which was recognised for the first time in the current coalition agreement at federal level, arises, which actors are involved in it, what interests and power relations exist between them, and what instruments are used.

This will be done in six steps: 1) Context analysis; 2) Stakeholder analysis; 3) Instrument analysis; 4) Process analysis; 5) Results and impact analysis; 6) Recommendations for policy-making or reforms

The following methods are used: literature review (e.g. for impact analysis), document analysis (e.g. legal texts, reports), expert interviews

#### ***Module 4: Integration***

The aim of the flagship project is to integrate theoretical approaches from social science climate and housing research in order to better understand the complex process of urban heat transition empirically. All employees of the flagship project work together to identify empirical and theoretical research gaps and opportunities for integrating both fields of research. In addition to the Heat Transition Workshop (see below), elements of this integration include a regular joint reading colloquium and synthesis workshops held at the end of each year, at which the state of research from the modules is reported and joint exploitation opportunities along the overarching questions are explored. The results of the workshops are recorded and the research process is further developed on this basis. Further elements integrating the modules include joint events such as panels at conferences (possibly resulting in special issues), joint workshops with external guests (national/international), stays abroad and guest research activities at institutions that already integrate social science housing and climate research (e.g. the universities of Flensburg, Barcelona and Malmö). The flagship project also aims to support the networking of scientific communities from social science housing and climate research. To this end, a workshop with scientists from both disciplines, primarily from German-speaking countries, will be held in the first year of the flagship project. In the third year, another workshop will be held to discuss the integration of theoretical approaches in social science housing and climate research. Towards the end of the flagship project, 1 to 2 essays on theoretical integration will be published in co-authorship.

#### ***WerkstattWärmeWende: Transdisciplinary approaches in the flagship project***

In addition to the research work in the individual empirical modules, a comprehensive, transdisciplinary module will be designed jointly by all key project staff. In this module, regular workshops will bring together practitioners involved in the urban heat transition, primarily from civil society (NGOs, social movement initiatives, etc.), but also from administration and politics. Previous contact with these actors has clearly shown their need for a forum for exchange, as many of them otherwise have little opportunity for strategic dialogue. The aim is to establish and consolidate a community of practice comprising individuals and institutions that are committed to a socio-ecological urban heat transition but have so far acted in an uncoordinated manner and whose voices are underrepresented in public and political debate. The aim is to achieve a synergistic relationship between researchers and practitioners: in the run-up to the workshops, civil society actors will be consulted to determine how the expected research results of the individual modules can be meaningfully prepared for them and whether and, if so, how research questions and designs can be adapted. The format and content of the workshops will also be developed together with civil society actors to ensure that they are as beneficial as possible for them. The transdisciplinary format will be evaluated and further developed within the framework of an IRS concept workshop.

### e) Work phases

The modules are each divided into different work phases, the length and exact structure of which vary between modules:

**Preparation phase (months 1–12):** During the preparation phase, literature is reviewed, the empirical field is explored, case studies are identified, and contacts with potential interview partners are established.

**Empirical survey phase (7th-36th month):** In the empirical survey phase, data is collected in the individual modules, the research design is adjusted if necessary, and the theoretical framework is further developed.

**Evaluation/utilisation phase (months 18–48):** The focus of this phase is on the scientific utilisation of the research results, primarily in the form of peer-reviewed articles in German and English.

**Integration phase (months 10–48):** In the integration phase, particular attention is paid to integrating approaches from social science housing and climate research in order to make the flagship project theoretically fruitful.

### f) Expected results and product

By exploring an emerging field of research that is highly topical and volatile in political terms, we can produce empirically rich contributions with a high degree of innovation and play a prominent role in the debate. This is because the nexus between housing and heating has hardly been researched in social science climate research to date, and ecological aspects are only beginning to be considered in housing research. At the theoretical level, better integration of approaches from the two research fields promises new impetus for both scientific communities. Approaches from transformation research will be made fruitful for housing research. For climate research, political-economic approaches offer a new analytical perspective on questions of socio-ecological transformation.

As part of the flagship project, at least ten presentations will be given at international and national conferences. In addition, a session on the topic of urban heat transition will be organised at a renowned scientific conference. The results will be published as part of Inés Gartlinger's cumulative doctoral thesis in the form of journal articles, and as part of Paul Seidel's doctoral thesis in the form of journal articles or a monograph. In addition to the doctoral theses, the results of the flagship project will be published in further articles in peer-reviewed journals, at least two of which will be co-authored by the participants in the flagship project.

In addition to the scientific results, the transdisciplinary module contributes to the networking of practitioners. The WerkstattWärmeWende (Heat Transition Workshop) as an exchange format and transfer activities in the individual modules (e.g. in the form of participation in panel discussions, media coverage, consulting activities, etc.) generate explanatory knowledge, orientation knowledge and practical knowledge for civil society, politics, administration and business in the field of urban heat transition.

g) *Timetable for the flagship project*

|   | 2026 |    |     |    | 2027 |    |     |    | 2028 |    |     |    | 2029 |    |     |    |
|---|------|----|-----|----|------|----|-----|----|------|----|-----|----|------|----|-----|----|
|   | I    | II | III | IV |
| <b>Preparation phase</b>                |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Module 1                                |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Module 2                                |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Module 3                                |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| <b>Survey phase</b>                     |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Module 1                                |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Module 2                                |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Module 3                                |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| <b>Evaluation phase</b>                 |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Module 1                                |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Module 2                                |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Module 3                                |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| <b>Integration module</b>               |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Reading colloquium                      |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Synthesis Workshop                      |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Workshops with the scientific community |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| <b>WorkshopHeatTransition</b>           |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Concept with ZG                         |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Workshop                                |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Evaluation                              |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |

#### 4.4 Qualification projects

##### Doctoral projects

**Name:** Dr Lisa Vollmer

**Duration of qualification project:** 2025-2027

**University:** Technical University of Berlin Institute of Sociology, Faculty IV Planning, Building, Environment

**Supervisors:** Prof. Dr. Johanna Hoerning (Department of Spatial Sociology)

**(Working) title:** Transformation of housing regimes. Actors, visions, obstacles

**Abstract:**

The habilitation thesis addresses the question of how housing regimes change, under what conditions and with what influence from different groups of actors. The cumulative habilitation thesis examines the actors involved in this change – state institutions, civil society organisations and actors

in the housing industry – as well as their rationales for action, path dependencies and the ideas for transformation they have developed. Five articles have already been published, and two more are in progress or planned. The framework paper presents a theorisation of the transformation of housing regimes.

**Name:** Inés Gartlinger

**Duration of the qualification project:** 2026 - 2029

**University:** BTU Cottbus

**Supervisors:** Prof. Dr Ludger Gailing, Dr Wolfgang Haupt

**(Working) title:** Modes of Experimental Governance in the Urban Heating Transition in Germany

**Abstract:**

This doctoral project examines experimental governance as a changing interplay between government action and civil society and economic practices in transformation processes, using the example of the urban heating transition in Germany. "Experimental governance" refers to exploratory, learning and adaptive strategies and forms of coordination that respond to the complexity of socio-ecological transformation and the associated uncertainties in the field of heating transition. Depending on the urban context, the constellations of actors, control options, and spatial and infrastructural conditions differ, which requires the activation and coordination of different groups of actors through different modes of governance and results in different institutional and socio-technical reconfigurations. The cumulative doctoral project is dedicated to all three levels – varying modes of experimental governance, their spatiality and the resulting reconfigurations.

Paul Seidel's doctoral project (start date 16 June 2025) is still under development and will be integrated into the research strategy of the research focus at a later date. From autumn 2025, another postdoctoral researcher will also join the team. A corresponding qualification project will be developed from 2026.

## 4.5 Knowledge transfer

The work of the research focus develops orientation and practical knowledge for practitioners. A particular focus is on the intersection between housing and climate policies. Accordingly, policymakers and planning authorities, energy and housing companies, associations and civil society organisations are the primary recipients of knowledge transfer. Two areas of focus have been identified:

- a) *Activities in policy and social consulting:* This approach has proven successful in the previous research programme and will be continued. Here, the researchers in the research focus are sought-after partners for politics, administration, initiatives and the media ( ), which is reflected in a high number of enquiries. Their consulting services include both written (e.g. expert reports, policy papers) and oral (e.g. roundtable discussions, committees) formats. The

level of work already achieved in this area is to be secured and maintained in the 2026-29 research programme.

- b) *Transdisciplinary research:* The "WerkstattWärmeWende" (Heat Transition Workshop) anchored in the flagship project plays a central role in establishing and expanding transdisciplinary working formats. It aims to build a "community of practice" in which committed individuals and institutions network for a socio-ecological urban heat transition. The content and design of the workshops will be developed in close cooperation with civil society partners in order to integrate their perspectives and needs from the outset and create concrete added value for their work. At the same time, the workshops open up spaces for productive dialogue with research, for example by contributing to the joint development of relevant questions.

## 5. Research focus "Contemporary History and Archives"

### 5.1 Profile of the research focus

This research focus deals with the planning, design and appropriation of spaces in modern and contemporary history. The proximity of research and scientific collections is a special feature of this focus, with both being linked by research and methods of digital history, among other things. There is currently particular interest in the history of housing, home ownership and urbanisation in the European context, the history of architecture and urban development in the GDR, research into materiality in the historical transformation of the built environment and the multiscale history of infrastructure in the "Global South", as well as cross-border cooperation in spatial development. The research focus analyses the historical origins of current socio-spatial processes and opens up perspectives on long-term continuities as well as breaks and crises in spatial development. It also addresses the challenges of dealing with architectural heritage and the value of the past in the present.

Research into new forms of transmitting and archiving current knowledge for future generations in the age of digitalisation is another focus. This includes issues relating to the archiving of digital architectural designs as well as the concrete collection, cataloguing (and, where necessary, restoration) and research of holdings on the architectural and building history of the GDR and, increasingly, the 1990s. In addition to researchers, the main target groups are the interested public, civil society initiatives, local authorities, ministries and museums. The research projects are organised in the research group (FG) "Historical Urban and Spatial Research", the FG "History of the Built Environment" and the research infrastructure group (FIS) "Digital History / Scientific Collections".

### 5.2 Profiles of the research groups

#### 5.2.1 Research Group "Historical Urban and Spatial Research"

Head: Prof. Dr. Kerstin Brückweh

The research group is located at the interface between general contemporary history and urban, planning and architectural history. Among other things, it focuses its research on maps of various kinds as analysis and visualisation tools. It also pursues projects in the field of urban and urbanisation history. This includes the integrated analysis of social and planning history processes in both German states. It also examines the respective spatial contexts and the history of interdependence in the global Cold War. Recently, research has intensified on key institutions of the state and the construction industry, using the examples of the Federal Statistical Office, the Treuhand-Liegenschaftsgesellschaft ( ) and the Bauakademie, with a particular focus on the period of transformation at the turn of the 1990s.

This temporal extension to the period of transformation and the inclusion of digital history and participatory citizen science approaches form a point of overlap with the research infrastructure

group "Digital History/Scientific Collections". New to the research group is a focus on the history of residential and real estate ownership. This brings land as a contested, scarce resource into focus, supplemented by historical analysis of different living spaces and forms of housing and the respective living experiences associated with them. The focus is on the single-family home in the suburbs, the villa district in the long 20th century, but also the history of experiences in large housing estates and discourses on homelessness. This addresses different social spaces and their impact on inequalities in societies.

#### *5.2.2 Research Group "History of the Built Environment"*

*Head: Dr Monika Motylińska*

The research group examines the history of the built environment in the 19th and 20th centuries from a global perspective. Its analyses include the production of building materials, the construction of buildings and infrastructure, and the appropriation, maintenance, conversion and decay of buildings and ensembles. Spatially, the focus is on locations in the "Global South," particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America. These are examined with regard to their position in regional and transnational exchange relationships, for example in the circulation of construction and architectural knowledge and in value chains in the construction industry. The group works interdisciplinarily at the interface of architectural and urban history, economic geography, and social anthropology. It draws on methods from the digital humanities (e.g. deep mapping, network analysis), questions established disciplinary patterns of interpretation and critically examines the practice of archiving. To this end, it also engages in dialogue with the IRS's scientific collections and builds on its broad research network.

The research group has its origins in the Freigeist project funded by the Volkswagen Foundation on projects by German construction companies in the "Global South". Over the next four years, these investigations will be expanded and deepened by looking at "global players" from southern Africa and by researching the history of (transport) infrastructure and issues relating to the history of climate-adapted construction in the "Global South" and "Global East". The close cooperation between the research groups is also evident in the doctoral thesis jointly supervised by Kerstin Brückweh and Monika Motylińska as part of the new flagship project of the research focus on the topic of "soil".

#### *5.2.3 Research Infrastructure Group "Digital History / Scientific Collections"*

*Head: Dr Kai Drewes*

The research infrastructure group comprises the scientific collections on the recent architectural and planning history of East Germany. Whereas the focus had previously been on the GDR period, it now also covers the period after 1990. At the same time, the group is building up a portfolio of digital history activities, primarily in the areas of mapping (GIS) and 4D reconstruction, text mining and the use of AI – each with close links to the holdings of the scientific collections. At its core, the group continues to collect, index, make accessible and communicate and network in various ways the relevant estates and bequests of East German figures from the fields of architecture and planning. Domestic and international users from research and other fields access this important special archive on the recent urban development and spatial history of East Germany and are supported by the

collection team. Citizens are also involved in the work: through citizen science projects, they contribute to the description of visual objects, among other things. The group presents digitised archival materials on the online portal [stadt-raum-geschichte.de](http://stadt-raum-geschichte.de), which also invites the public to participate.

### **5.3 Flagship project "History from below – revisited. Soil as a neglected basis of historical processes in the long 20th century"**

**Project team:** Kerstin Brückweh, Monika Motylińska, Rita Gudermann, Anastasia Betsa, N.N. (doctoral candidate)

**Keywords:** Soil, materiality, infrastructure, (land) ownership, transformation

#### *a) Outline of the problem*

Anyone driving through south-west Berlin today will increasingly encounter signs from a citizens' initiative protesting against a major construction site for the extension of underground line 3. Local residents are putting forward various arguments: poor planning, excessive costs, protection of old trees, noise from the construction work and the listed status of the station building. The digging, drilling and stabilising underground not only reveals what is otherwise hidden, but also highlights the impact that such tunnel construction has on the space above: on nature, property prices and quality of life.

Firstly, this example shows the importance of the materiality of the ground for the design of spaces. Secondly, it illustrates the importance of the ground for social interaction. The ground is thus the interface where property, the common good, technical feasibility and symbolic orders intersect, and thus where the central areas of tension of modernity intersect. The ground as a constitutive but hitherto neglected aspect of spaces in historical science will be at the centre of the flagship project in FS III.

In recent decades, historical research has produced a variety of perspectives on spaces and things and the relationships between them in the wake of *the spatial turn* and *material turn*. Concepts of space (e.g. Middell 2008, Rau 2017, Walch/Schaefer/Shahar 2022, Schwarz 2024) have been intensively reflected upon and made methodologically productive (sceptical review of earlier literature: Dipper/Raphael 2011). But how does soil relate to this? Space is understood as a relational, socially constructed entity (Löw 2001). Soil, on the other hand – according to the hypothesis of the flagship project – has a stronger anchoring in the material ( ; for the discussion of the concepts of the material and the material, see Motylińska et al. 2024). Soil is classified, owned, managed and regulated as a geological, agricultural, legal, economic, physically tangible and geodatatable basis, and is thus understood as limited or limiting "in its non-reproducibility and indispensability" (Feichtner, 2025, p. 36), which is also illustrated by terms such as resource or legal basis or knowledge infrastructures such as the land register or cadastre and elementary practices surrounding them (Maier 2016). However, soil and space are not antipodes. Rather, the thesis is that space cannot be conceived without soil, and soil cannot be conceived without space. On the one hand, like space, land is not neutral, but is always embedded in economic, legal, social and political power relations

(fundamental: Scott 1999, Latour 2018, Macfarlane 2021, Schultz 2024, Albertus 2025). On the other hand, soil, like space, is structured differently in terms of scale (Koselleck 2000, Bobette/Donovan 2018). The difference, however, is that soil cannot escape its "stubborn materiality" (e.g. Sippel 2023) – just as space is detached from Euclidean principles and understood as immaterial (e.g. Christmann 2016). The ground lends an indispensable verticality to the rather horizontal dimension of the surface, and when time is taken into account, the ground ultimately becomes a "four-dimensional system" as a "space-time structure" (Schroeder 1992, p. 9). In the flagship project outlined here, soil serves as a productive irritant to the tension between horizontal and vertical, between relation and matter. For soil – according to the thesis – is that upon which space is designed, built, lived and perceived, i.e. it is not only socially constructed, but also socially appropriated in its materiality, thus representing "history from below" in every respect.

While space is firmly anchored in the consciousness of historical research, soil has been neglected historiographically (but see, for example, Moss 2025). When it does come into focus, for example in architectural and urban history (Cupers 2024, Schmid/Topalovic 2023, Corbo 2022, Alexander 2023, Peleman et al. 2021, Führer 2016), agricultural history (Lanzinger/Zimmermann 2020, Uekötter 2024), environmental history (Erley 2018, Meulemans 2020, Uekötter 2012, 2023, 2023b), the history of knowledge (Chu 2020, Latour 1993), economic history, legal history and in the historical examination of property relations (Breuer 2022, Hansjürgens/Lienkamp/Möckel 2022, Siegrist/Müller 2015, Brückweh 2019, Schwarze 2024, Angebauer/Wesche 2024), its significance is linked to issues of land distribution, colonialism (Bazdyrieva 2022, Jureit 2022), imperialism, sedentarisation, environmental conditions, property and state formation, albeit mostly without systematic conceptualisation. According to historian Jürgen Osterhammel, "the order of the land [...] is a fundamental operation of modernity. In the great collectivisations of the 20th century [...] it came to the surface in a visible way. Otherwise, it usually remains hidden from historians" (Osterhammel 2011, pp. 172-173).

One reason for this gap is that the term "soil" oscillates between physical substrate, legal-political category and cultural attribution of meaning (e.g. homeland, identity), which makes it difficult to define conceptually and semantically (Williams 1990, Dobraszczyk et al. 2016, Latour 2020). Its discursive complexity is also evident in language and idioms (e.g. as noted by Cupers 2016, Thériault 2020). A second reason for the reluctance of historical research can be found in its ideological appropriation by National Socialism, for example through the formula "blood and soil" (see, among others, Jureit 2016, Bassin 2005, Schmitz-Berning 2007, Corni/Gies 1994, Harlander/Pyta 2010, Dornheim 2021, Consolati 2021, Schmitz 2022). Similar dynamics affected the concept of space. Its association with racial ideology and violent politics led to soil being avoided as a field of research (Schneider 2012).

The flagship project is aware of the challenges outlined above and proposes to examine "soil" as an open, historically shaped and conflictual category that cannot be reduced to a single dimension for analytical purposes. Soil is neither a solid foundation in the sense of epistemic certainty nor a mere natural given, but rather a dynamic actant (Latour 2007, Roßler 2020) and a social body of reflection and projection in a space shaped by historical processes. The title "History from below – revisited" is therefore deliberately ambiguous and explores soil both as a substance with a life of its own and as forms of appropriation by various historical actors.

### b) Questions

Including soil in historical analyses enables, on the one hand, a productive irritation of the concept of space, which has also become established in historical science through the *spatial turn*. On the other hand, it is about the historical research of the significance of soil itself, namely for historical processes extending into the present and future. The focus is therefore fundamentally on the following questions:

- *Research into the past or the phenomenon:* To which spatial dimensions does soil refer when, where and how in history: horizontally as a surface and vertically as a built-up or used environment below and above the earth's surface?
- *Contribution to (theoretical) conceptualisation:* To what extent does the inclusion of soil in historical analysis require a readjustment of the relationship between the relational concept of space and the concept of soil, which has been neglected in historical studies?
- *Actors and appropriations:* How can history be told from below when "below" is also meant literally in terms of spatial dimensions? Does taking soil seriously change everyday forms of appropriation, e.g. in the daily work of engineers, planners, etc., but also in the everyday activities of, for example, city dwellers, landowners, or soil-working farmers and seasonal workers?
- *Relevance to the present and, where applicable, the future:* To what extent is it necessary to incorporate past conceptualisations of soil into existing discussions of space in order to understand and overcome current challenges, not least wars between nation states over mineral resources, mining and access conditions (e.g. for rare earths), but also land grabbing, climate change, etc.? Soil is always also a scene of negotiation of power relations and continues to reveal historically conditioned social inequalities: Who owns the soil? Who is allowed to use it? What cultural significance is attached to it? How is it mapped, measured, owned, defended, symbolically charged?

A project conceived in this way could go far back in history and examine historical economic cycles of land. However, in accordance with the orientation of FS III, the flagship project outlined here will focus on the analysis of the planning, design and appropriation of spaces in modern and contemporary history. The major, even global, turning points of the world wars, especially the Second World War of 1939–1945, and the transformations around 1989–1991, and thus the end of the Cold War and, almost parallel to this, the official end of apartheid in South Africa, serve as guidelines for structuring the long 20th century. For the selection of the areas of investigation, see d) *Methods*, and for the three-step methodological approach in which the above-mentioned major questions are to be operationalised, see section e) *Work phases*.

### c) Theoretical approaches

The flagship project is fundamentally influenced by various, primarily constructivist theories of space (fundamentally Löw 2001, Dünne/Günzel 2021), while also drawing on discussions about materiality (Hutton 2020). Preliminary work from FS III has already been carried out here as part of Monika Motylińska's research group with the concept of "material constraints" (Motylińska et al. 2024, Jeldes

et al. 2025) and by Kerstin Brückweh in a programmatic sense in her inaugural lecture on the significance of soil in the history of housing ( Brückweh, forthcoming ). At the same time, it is characteristic of historical research that it is not solely theory-driven or that a theory is the goal of the research. Rather, the ground is explored as an analytical reference point in its various forms and conceptualisations in the interplay of questions, sources and theories. The combined approach of FS III, consisting of research and archiving, is particularly well suited for this purpose, because access to sources on the subject of ground can be experimentally tested using the material available at the IRS (e.g. the extensive holdings of the offices for territorial planning). At the same time, this is also relevant for the programme "Working with Society" because the archive and, above all, its non-academic staff are transdisciplinary by nature, working together with the academics.

The Collaborative Research Centre "SFB 1265 Re-figurations of Spaces" (Löw/Knoblauch 2019) offers a certain role model for the theoretical approach of this lead project. According to its own statements, it is transdisciplinary in orientation and presents a theory-driven empirical justification of the overall methodology developed on the basis of grounded theory. It also develops a glossary, which, however, is not participatory in nature as planned in the lead project (see below). In addition, the historical perspective is largely absent from the SFB.

#### *d) Methods*

The lead project conducts in-depth analyses of decidedly heterogeneous urban and rural spaces (including in Germany, Argentina and southern Africa). However, it does not aim to make systematic historical comparisons (e.g. Kaelble 2024). The idea behind this is that national categories of comparison contribute only to a limited extent to the understanding of soil as a constitutive element of space, and that a material consideration of soil leads to a dissolution of the national categories of comparison, which is also increasingly called for in historical research elsewhere (e.g. Patel 2016). There are three reasons for choosing heterogeneous areas of investigation (and time periods): Firstly, this enables in-depth investigations into both capitalist and (post-)socialist contexts under conditions of transformation, which appears particularly productive for analyses of shifts in meaning and practices of appropriation. Secondly, as preliminary work (including field research on site) has shown, these seemingly distant spaces are exceptionally well suited to investigating the transmission of *travelling concepts* (Bal 2002, Neumann/Nünning 2012) by focusing on actors from the German or German-speaking diaspora and their respective translation practices and adaptation strategies. Thirdly, transnational historical research thrives on lively exchange with local academic communities, which is already guaranteed thanks to preliminary work in FS III (e.g. in Argentina and South Africa) and with researchers on the history of *global socialism* (Stanek 2020, Trecker 2020). This broad approach makes it possible to include a variety of actors, spheres of action, narratives and concepts in the analysis and, based on this heterogeneity, to jointly achieve an approximation in the lead project to the ground that has not yet been conceptualised in its various dimensions in historical research.

During the preparation of the flagship project, it became clear that a **glossary** is a helpful and even necessary tool for analysing the different dimensions of soil throughout history. In line with the research programme "Working with Society", the glossary that has been started is to be designed as a participatory, digital tool that specifically involves the "community of practice" around the scientific

collections (see 3.5 and 3.6) and asks them about their different perspectives on soil in their own work. The glossary serves to document an understanding of the significance of soil in different disciplinary and linguistic contexts throughout historical change, thereby translating the specifically German-language term "Boden" into English and making it compatible with international discussions. In addition, the glossary can be used to record the concrete effects of soil concepts on construction projects, political decisions or the design of maps, etc. The structure of the glossary is not classic lexicographical, but rather actor- or project-related. This makes it possible to identify "semantic fields" and "argumentation structures" (Steber 2017), even where the word "soil" does not explicitly appear, e.g. in visual sources.

In addition, the flagship project fundamentally employs proven historical methods, which focus on the analysis of a wide variety of sources guided by specific questions. In particular, the flagship project draws on the history of terms and concepts (e.g. Fernández Sebastián 2011) and on the shared interest of various researchers in FS III in digital and cartographic approaches.

#### e) Work phases

Against this background, the work phases of the planned flagship project are based on a **three-step approach**. Each of these phases is guided by specific questions, and the glossary outlined above is a continuous component throughout all three work phases.

In the **first, conceptual phase of the project**, in which the historical and interdisciplinary examination of soil in recent decades is critically evaluated and research results and gaps are identified, the following questions, for example, are at the forefront:

- How has soil been conceptualised in history (and in historical studies) at different points in time?
- How can "soil" be translated into English scientific language, or how is this term translated or used in English? How can this translation into English be refined by drawing on word fields and terms from other languages, especially those from the empirical spaces analysed in this lead project, such as Argentina or Romania?
- What is the relationship between the concept and materiality of "soil"? What approach can be used to describe this relationship?

**Empirical case studies** form the core of **the second phase**. The starting point is two doctoral theses on the transfer of concepts from Germany to Argentina and on ownership structures and the reorganisation of land in (post)socialist areas (presumably Romania, Verdery 2003). Both projects contribute to the theoretical conceptualisation of terms and to the investigation of actor constellations and appropriation practices. Furthermore, research results from third-party funded projects that have already been approved and are running parallel to the research programme will be incorporated (in particular the Freigeist project "Conquering (with) Concrete" on property relations and the SAW project "RichMap" on villa districts in the long 20th century).

The case studies are linked by the following questions:

- Which actors circulate which concepts of land transnationally, when and with what effect?

- How did actors and institutions use land as an instrument of power in the long 20th century (especially after systemic breaks) and with what effects?
- What assessments of land are made at what times? How is land that is considered valuable or worthless or even dangerous dealt with?
- How did legal, social, everyday, scientific, cultural and ideological conceptualisations of soil shape concrete urbanisation processes?

In a **third phase**, based on the combination of the concept developed in the first phase and the concrete results of the empirical case studies from the second phase, a **revised analytical concept for the study of "soil"** will be developed using the following questions:

- What characteristics can be identified for the analytical concept of "soil" that transcend the different areas and times under investigation?
- Where and at what times can clear differences be identified?
- How must the initial concept from phase 1 be adapted, and how could a proposal for a new, more comprehensive and integrative research approach to the historical evaluation of soil be designed?
- What significance do the deep mapping methods tested in various FS III projects have in analysing, for example, the long-term economic valorisation of urban property beyond the turning points of 1933/45 and 1989?
- To what extent are some of the conceptual and methodological foundations developed in FS III to date, such as *material constraints* or *dispersed archives* (Motylińska et al. 2024; Sprute – forthcoming), helpful for a multi-layered understanding of "land"?

At the end of this three-step conceptual process in the lead project, "land" should be identified as a fundamental historical category, examined using selected empirical examples, and introduced in a revised form into the historical debate or offered for future historical analyses.

#### *f) Expected results and products/outcomes*

The historiographical reappropriation of "soil" has a dual purpose: on the one hand, it aims to fill an analytical gap, to develop "soil" as a productive category for historical research and to make it linguistically compatible with international discourse (e.g. through a glossary). On the other hand, the project also aims to contribute to framing and deepening current social debates on soil in a historical context. The category of "soil" offers – both for the research focus and for the IRS as a whole – the potential to rethink the historical dynamics of space, power and materiality, while at the same time leading historical science itself onto epistemologically uncertain terrain, where new perspectives for understanding the present and perhaps also shaping the future can be gained.

The expected results include a readjustment and re-emphasis of the concept of "soil" for historical research, especially contemporary historical research:

- The historically burdened aspects of soil (Nazism, blood and soil, expropriations, material and ideological contamination) will be critically analysed.

- The potential of soil for an integrative history of space and materiality in different regions, their transnational connections, typological analogies and divergences (actors, actants, negotiation processes) will be highlighted.
- The overarching goal is thus to analytically reconceptualise soil as a basic category in its significance for material-spatial developments.

The results in terms of content should be visible in the following outputs:

- 2 doctoral theses in historical studies, i.e. 2 monographs
- 1 essay on citizen science in historical studies
- 1 programmatic essay on soil as a historical basic category for an audience of historians
- 1 programmatic essay on soil from a historical perspective for an interdisciplinary audience with a spatial focus
- 4 essays from the empirical sub-projects, possibly as a special issue

The lead project is intended to form an independent core project of the research work in the focus area, marking a core profile of the department. However, as it also arose from discussions throughout FS III and the third-party funded projects already approved, it simultaneously offers a platform beyond the core team and allows us to expect products beyond those mentioned here. The lead project thus contributes to strengthening the coherence of FS III.

*g) Timetable for the flagship project*

| Phasen   | 2026 |    |     |    | 2027 |    |     |    | 2028 |    |     |    | 2029 |    |     |    |
|--|------|----|-----|----|------|----|-----|----|------|----|-----|----|------|----|-----|----|
|  | I    | II | III | IV |
| <b>1. Phase</b>  |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Aufarbeitung Forschungsstand   |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Entwurf Konzept "Boden"  |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| <b>2. Phase</b>  |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Empirische Fallbeispiele   |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| <b>3. Phase</b>  |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Überarbeitung Konzept "Boden"  |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Niederschrift Doktorarbeiten   |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Erstellen partizipativen Glossars  |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Aufbau „community of practice“   |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| <b>Projektbegleitende partizipative Transfermodule („Mit der Gesellschaft arbeiten“)</b> |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Forschungsatelier (mit externen Gästen)  |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Workshop   |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Abschlusskonferenz mit Präsentation des Glossars   |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| <b>Outputs</b>   |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Forschungswerkstatt (FS3 intern)   |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Glossar  |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Aufsätze   |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |
| Dissertationen   |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     |    |      |    |     | 2  |



## 5.4 Qualification projects

### *Doctoral projects*

**Name:** Anastasia Betsa

**Duration of the doctoral project:** November 2024 – October 2028

**University:** European University Viadrina Frankfurt (Oder)

**Supervisors:** Kerstin Brückweh, Monika Motylińska

**(Working) title:** *Grounding Buenos Aires: Representations and uses of soil and land in urbanisation (1875–1945)*

**Abstract:**

This doctoral project examines ideological and technical circulations between Buenos Aires and Germany that are anchored in the soil. The dissertation analyses concepts of soil in the colonisation project on the Argentine pampas and in the associated urban expansion and will be part of the new flagship project from 2026 onwards. The key questions of the project are: What knowledge about soil underpinned the urbanisation of Buenos Aires? Who produced it and who used it? What specific projects resulted from it? To answer these research questions, historical maps and cadastral records, agricultural reports and colony foundations, as well as underground infrastructure projects will be analysed. A cross-section of the soil of the greater Buenos Aires area will thus shed light on the intertwined and multi-scalar dynamics of urbanisation by opening up a horizontal and vertical perspective.

**Name:** Laurent Kohouri N'Guessan

**Duration of the doctoral project:** February 2024 – January 2027

**University:** Félix Houphouët-Boigny University in Abidjan

**Supervision:** Alassane Diabaté, Monika Motylińska

**Working title:** *History of transport architecture in Abidjan*

**Abstract:**

This monographic dissertation project examines the history of mobility infrastructure in general and bridges in particular in the city of Abidjan in Ivory Coast from the colonial period to the post-colonial period. It begins with the construction of the floating bridge in 1929 and ends in 1970 with the start of the "Ivorian economic miracle" following the construction of the two fixed bridges over the Ebrié lagoon in the 1950s and 1960s. Based on extensive research in national archives and documentation centres (e.g. the Ministry of Urban Planning and the National Office for Technical Studies) as well as oral interviews, the thesis focuses on examining the bridges as a lens for the history of mobility infrastructures on several levels. It analyses the impact of the bridges on the urban development of Abidjan at the level of the main transport axes, as well as the everyday impact in the specific environment.

**Name:** N.N.

**Duration of the doctoral project:** from January 2026 to December 2029 (expected)

**University:** European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder)

**Supervisor:** Kerstin Brückweh

**(Working) title:** Land in Romania before, during and after 1989/91

**Abstract:**

As part of the flagship project "History from below – revisited. Land as a neglected basis of historical processes in the long 20th century", which will begin in 2026, a second doctoral thesis is planned that will deal with the history of transformation in two countries – ideally the GDR/East Germany and Romania – with regard to land use and ownership before, during and after the upheaval. The focus will be on the question of how, in such a situation of political upheaval, supposedly rigid institutions such as land, land ownership and their legal fixation gained a certain elasticity and were redefined and redistributed.

**Name:** Lilli Rast

**Duration of the doctoral project:** May 2025 – April 2028

**University:** European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder)

**Supervisor:** Kerstin Brückweh

**(Working) title:** Mapping wealth. Maps as tools for symbolic spatial production

**Abstract:**

As part of the Leibniz Association-funded joint project "Where the Rich Live: Mapping Villa Neighbourhoods and Cultures of Wealth in Germany's Long 20th Century (RichMap)", this dissertation examines maps in two ways. It asks how maps and other spatial sources contribute to the construction of villa neighbourhoods as symbolic places and what digital mapping methods can contribute to the historical analysis of wealth.

**Name:** Paul Treffenfeldt

**Duration of doctoral project:** July 2024 – June 2028

**University:** European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder)

**Supervisor:** Kerstin Brückweh

**(Working) title:** The Numbers of the Republic. The History of the Federal Statistical Office during the Transformation Period

**Abstract:**

Statistics are the most important tool for describing economic and social mass phenomena. The Federal Statistical Office is the central authority for collecting, processing and disseminating this quantitative form of knowledge in the Federal Republic of Germany. As the producer of official statistics, it is of paramount importance for understanding the state of the economy and population within the country. The forms of statistical description are not rigid. The methods and definitions of statistical social description are constantly changing – particularly dynamically when their subject matter is also changing dynamically. The dissertation examines developments in the Federal Statistical Office with its key players and products. The work is structured around the question of the various dimensions of change: structural, personnel and methodological aspects, but also content-

related aspects such as the Office's publication and interpretation practices. The dissertation project thus lies at the interface between historical research on authorities and institutions on the one hand and research on quantitative knowledge production on the other.

## 5.5 Knowledge transfer

Scientific communication in FS III is dialogue-based and oriented towards the logic of individual third-party funded projects and specific target groups. For example, the project "How the past counts. On the history of the Federal Statistical Office (GeStat)" (2024 – 2028) implements formats on the intranet of the Federal Statistical Office. The Bauakademie project examines the social relevance of historical research approaches, and participatory processes play a central role in the SAW project RichMap. In addition, knowledge transfer formats are emerging from requests from civil society actors, such as citizens' initiatives or monument preservation authorities.

Two projects have been designed for the new research programme "Working with Society". Firstly, a collaboratively developed glossary on the subject of soil, which collects terms from the flagship project work, contextualises them in an interdisciplinary and historical manner, supplements them with contributions from social actors, and makes them compatible with international discussions. It functions both as an internal research tool and as a platform for participatory exchange and reflects the significance of soil concepts in politics, planning and cartography.

The second project builds on the scientific collections and establishes a community of practice around the archive, which will also be consulted on the topic of soil – both nationally and internationally, including in dialogue with partners from the Global South. For the IRS archive, the main focus will be on systematising existing networks, which will be recorded in a digital CRM system.

## 5.6 Development of the research infrastructure

Development can build on the following starting point: The IRS research infrastructure has developed positively in the first half of the 2020s, i.e. it is highly regarded and frequently used both within FS III itself and externally. Recently, the scientific collections have grown noticeably once again with regard to analogue materials. In addition, digital objects are increasingly being acquired and also generated in the research infrastructure (in some cases in close cooperation with projects in FS III). For these reasons, and also because of growing demands on scientific archives, it is necessary to further develop the collection strategy, which raises the following key questions, among others:

- How should the increased importance of the post-GDR period be taken into account in the collection?
- How can the fruitful intertwining of collecting, researching and communicating in FS III be further developed?
- Under what conditions should born-digital materials (including CAD designs and geodata), certain research data (including interviews) and special materials such as selected social data be archived?

- How should challenging issues such as the underrepresentation of materials by female architects and diversity issues in general be dealt with in the collections?
- How do framework conditions, especially the increasing lack of space in the IRS itself, affect the collection strategy?
- How should the issue of the growing importance of knowledge management be addressed?
- Given the lack of an institute archive at the IRS, how should the IRS's old files be handled?

The consistent bundling of digital activities (and thus, in part, of FS cross-sectional tasks) in the research infrastructure has proven successful and also offers opportunities for high-profile projects, including with external partners. The involvement of citizen science actors, as in the CitizenArchives project, also plays a role here and is to be expanded with third-party funding. The Scientific Collections have established themselves as an important service partner for researchers from within the institution as well as from Germany and abroad, and are increasingly expanding their expertise. Rounding off holdings from the GDR era remains a central task of the Scientific Collections. In recent years, there has been an increasing focus on acquiring materials from the period after 1990, which are becoming increasingly important for both archiving and research. Here, the development of the collection strategy should be linked to academic discussions on the "archival turn," as the IRS has no obligation to collect, but rather becomes a "gatekeeper" of the collection of knowledge for future (researcher) generations. Supported by recommendations (e.g. from the Scientific Collections Advisory Board) and as a result of close cooperation with FS III researchers and other stakeholders, the core brand identity of the IRS's archival activities, i.e. the recent history of East German construction and planning, is to remain a unique selling point. In the coming years, the main focus will be on rounding off the existing portfolio of activities while remaining open to innovations and project contexts.

Against this backdrop, the research infrastructure should develop into an "experimental archive" in addition to its traditional tasks, initially by adding special analogue and/or digital holdings to the collections on a trial basis. This is due to the fact that certain historical research cannot always be based on conventional archive holdings, but rather source material must regularly be located in the course of research, particularly in private collections, and then acquired and catalogued. This is especially true in areas where state archiving is still inadequate. However, it also applies to novel research questions that cannot be answered using traditional approaches to collecting. An initial approach to building such a collection is represented by the family history and profession-specific documents on the history of the Cold War from the perspective of non-German actors, which have been compiled by researchers as part of the current SAW project CRAFTE. The experience gained in this process will also be transferred to other thematic areas of the archive.

The use and expansion of a "community of practice" for the new flagship project on soil in FS III is being tested using the example of the scientific collections. These collections are transdisciplinary in nature and already have extensive, but often unsystematically used, contacts with a large number of practitioners from the fields of architecture, urban planning and monument preservation, as well as from archives, libraries and museums in Germany and, in some cases, abroad. By establishing and maintaining a contact management system (CRM), cooperation with these actors is to be systematised and expanded, and made fruitful not only for the flagship project of FS III, but also for

the bridge project: In line with the premise of "working with society", the Scientific Collections' long-standing contacts with donors, scientists and practitioners are to be systematically utilised and further expanded as a "community of practice", also with the help of non-European research networks (e.g. via the CRAFT project). In this way, users and experts from the FS III context will also be involved thematically by being surveyed via a digital tool (similar to the existing procedures on the [stadt-raum-geschichte.de](#) portal on the changing meaning of the term "soil") and contributing to the glossary.

Overall, the profile and range of activities of the IRS research infrastructure will thus expand once again and become more diverse as a result of the developments mentioned above. The growing requirements must be continuously reflected upon, and care must be taken to ensure that sufficient resources are available or, if necessary, newly acquired.

### *Digital History*

At the end of 2023, after years of preparation, an important milestone in the digital and collection work of FS III was reached with the successful launch of its own portal, [stadt-raum-geschichte.de](#). The expansion of this complex website – combined with the ongoing cataloguing and selection of items for retro-digitisation and online publication from the department's own collections – as well as the provision of content to other cultural portals has become a new ongoing task for the research infrastructure. The acquisition and provision of already digitised documents from architecture or monument preservation offices, such as multi-layered digital design drawings (CAD), currently poses an enormous technical challenge, even for large architecture collections. In the coming years, the Scientific Collections will also begin piloting the integration of complex CAD files into the digital collection infrastructure.

Thanks to the hardware and software procured in 2021 and 2022 for a 4D and audio lab, it is now also possible to make high-quality audio and video recordings of (oral history) interviews, scan large-format plans, take aerial photographs, supplement existing maps with self-collected geodata, take building photographs, develop 4D simulations, and create virtual presentations and exhibitions. These technical resources each require an intensive training phase, but are already being used extensively by FS III staff and contribute not only to the processing of complex research questions using digital means (e.g. deep mapping, 3D reconstructions of lost buildings), but also to the creation of further digital holdings for the scientific collections.

### *Ongoing tasks, networking and communication*

The Scientific Collections have experienced considerable growth in recent years, and there are further opportunities on the horizon to acquire bequests and documents that are central to the collection's profile. These successes and opportunities also present challenges:

- Storage capacities are limited, and at the same time, the proper packaging and cataloguing of analogue materials is demanding and labour-intensive. An important task from 2026 onwards will therefore be to further consolidate and better penetrate existing holdings, in addition to continuing to collect new material, in order to improve the accessibility of the archives.

- The structured integration and processing of digital data, which is also being added on a permanent and increasing basis, is a no less time-consuming and important task.
- Research into the provenance of certain holdings or individual objects is likely to become more important.
- Outreach activities (including on the internet and in the form of often labour-intensive exhibitions) and intensive work with various stakeholder groups will also continue to be important for the research infrastructure in the future.
- There are also plans to create smaller digital exhibitions that are explicitly geared towards the interests of the public, for example on buildings threatened with demolition or on specific commemorative days.
- The continued acquisition of third-party funding projects remains essential for the IRS collections, among other things in order to advance the essential, demanding activities in the field of digitisation (e.g. of design drawings and photographs) and cataloguing.

Close cooperation with other cultural institutions and external partners is of considerable importance for the fulfilment of these tasks, and is likely to become even more important in the future. The IRS collections department's involvement in networks such as the Leibniz Association's Working Group on Archives, the Federation of German-Language Architecture Collections, the Leibniz Research Alliance "Value of the Past" ( ) and the NFDI4Memory consortium therefore remains strategically very important and will be continued.

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