



26th April 2013  
9.30 – 11.00 am  
followed by lunch  
IRS, Erkner

Elnur Amirkhlyev/vaeer.com



**Invitation  
to the 1<sup>st</sup> IRS INTERNATIONAL LECTURE  
on Society and Space**

## Toward a spatial perspective on sustainability transitions

Lars Coenen

**Abstract:** In the past decade, the literature on transitions toward sustainable socio-technical systems has made a considerable contribution in understanding the complex and multi-dimensional shifts considered necessary to adapt societies and economies to sustainable modes of production and consumption. Rooted in social studies of science and technology and evolutionary economics, transition is understood as “system innovations” between socio-technical configurations encompassing not only new technologies but also corresponding changes in markets, user practices, policy, cultural discourses as well as governing institutions. However, territorial context is frequently treated as a passive background variable providing little causal explanation or theoretical purchase. Territorial path-dependencies constituted by institutions, infrastructures and networks, for example, are often not well treated as explanatory variables in transition analysis. A second, related, issue, concerns the fairly simplistic usage or absence of spatial scale in existing transition analyses. In doing so, transition studies run the risk of undervaluing deliberate attempts at coordination across spatial levels, geographically distributed places as well as the potential opportunities, conflicts and tensions emerging from these attempts. Examples include international city networks for sustainable cities, global advocacy or policy networks, transnational corporate networks, as well as cross-regional technology and research platforms. Following these arguments, the lecture concludes that transitions research would do well to take a closer look at the geographical unevenness of transition processes from the perspective of global networks and local nodes.

**Bio:** Lars Coenen is Associate Professor at CIRCLE, the Centre for Innovation, Research and Competence in the Learning Economy, at Lund University, Sweden. His research is situated at the intersection of economic geography, innovation systems and socio-technical transitions. His PhD thesis (2006) entitled “Faraway, so Close! The Changing Geographies of Regional Innovation”, investigates how local and global knowledge is combined in a productive nexus of learning processes at the regional level. In recent years, Lars has engaged with research on the geography of sustainability transitions, looking at the emergence and diffusion of radical, disruptive innovation in energy and environment across different territorial contexts. He is involved in various international research projects, such as the FP7 project “Smart Specialization for Regional Innovation”.



**IRS**

Leibniz Institute for  
Regional Development  
and Structural Planning

IRS | Flakenstraße 28-31 | 15537 Erkner | [www.irs-net.de](http://www.irs-net.de)

Contact: Oliver Ibert | Tel + 49 (0) 33 62 / 7 93-150 | e-mail [ibert@irs-net.de](mailto:ibert@irs-net.de)