



Reinventing Sustainability

20.09.2024 / Futures Dialogue of the Leibniz Research Network
Knowledge for Sustainable Development (www.leibniz-sustain.de)

Neue Mälzerei, Friedenstraße 91, 10249 Berlin

Travel information: Underground: U5 until Strausberger Platz, 7 min. walk
Tram: M5/M6/M8 until Platz der Vereinten Nationen, 6 min. walk
Bus: 142 until Friedrichsberger Straße, 4 min. walk

List of participants

<i>Name</i>	<i>Affiliation</i>
Manuel Arias-Maldonado, Prof. Dr.	University of Malaga, Professor of Political Science, International Public Law and Procedural Law
Kerstin Bockhorn	City of Hamburg, Department of the Environment, Climate, Energy and Agriculture, Sustainability Unit
Felix Ekardt, Prof. Dr. Dr.	Research Unit Sustainability and Climate Policy, Leipzig; Director
Katharina Helming, Prof. Dr.	Leibniz Centre for Agricultural Landscape Research (ZALF), Head of research group Sustainability Impact Assessment
Anna Henkel, Prof. Dr.	Universität Passau, Chair of Sociology of Technology and Sustainable Development at the University of Passau
Ioana-Andra Horcea-Milcu, Prof. Dr.	University of Kassel, Institute for Sustainability, Professor of Cultures of Sustainability
Julia Leuterer	Local Agenda Dresden, Management Director
Alfred Olfert	Leibniz Institute of Ecological Urban and Regional Development (IOER), Dresden; Scientific Assistant to the Director
Marc Wolfram, Prof. Dr.	Leibniz Institute of Ecological Urban and Regional Development (IOER), Dresden; Director

Agenda Fri 20/9

08:30 Arrival and Coffee/Tea

09:00 Welcome and objectives
Marc Wolfram

9:10 Participant introductions & exploration

Perspectives I

9:30 Inputs I & Discussion

Sustainability in the Anthropocene
Manuel Jesus Arias-Maldonado

Dilemmas of Sustainability
Anna Henkel

10:30 – 10:45 Break

Perspectives II

10:45 Inputs II & Discussion

The transformative potential of sustainability science and of core human values
Ioana Andra Horcea-Milcu

Sustainability and the new concept of freedom
Felix Ekardt

12:00 – 13:00 Lunch break

Reinventing sustainability: Propositions

13:00 Propositions & discussion

14:50 Concluding remarks
Marc Wolfram

15:00 End of workshop

Background & objectives

“Sustainability” represents *the* dominant paradigm for overcoming the global social-ecological crises. It is the core guiding principle of overarching policy strategies at all levels (local to UN), as well as for the inter- and transdisciplinary field of sustainability sciences.

However, ever since its adoption on the international policy stage back in the 1990s the concept of “sustainability” has also always been subject to fundamental criticism. This ranges from questioning its ontological premises and ethical ambiguities (e.g. dualistic human-nature relation, vague justice notion, strong/weak variations, inherent growth orientation, unclear spatio-temporal reference etc.) to recognising its limited operational and procedural substance for guiding the transformation of complex socio-ecological-technological systems.

In the context of the Anthropocene such criticisms have become further reinforced. In view of a rapidly declining habitability of the planet, calls for a paradigm shift to guide transformations have thus multiplied. At the same time, the sustainability sciences have fostered the reflection on the ways in which science-society interactions affect transformations - typically also requiring to de-/reconstruct notions of “sustainability”.

In 2023 the Leibniz Association has set out to develop an umbrella strategy for mainstreaming “sustainability” across its member organisations (in management, research, transfer, human resources, operations), taking orientations from the LeNa guidelines.¹ This reflects the profile of Leibniz and its strong commitment to responsible fundamental and application-oriented research of high societal relevance. But it also revives the question of what the reference to “sustainability” actually implies.

Against this backdrop, this Future Dialogue aims to advance the critical debate on “sustainability” as a science and policy paradigm. It strives to identify ways forward that move beyond the diverse criticisms and offer options for coping with the existing range of institutions, practices and cultures linked to “sustainability”, but also allow to fill the gaps the concept has left open for the past decades. Our guiding question(s) to be addressed during the day will therefore be:

How should future science and policy deal with “sustainability”:

- *conceptually* (i.e. considering that it forms an empty signifier)?
- *practically* (i.e. considering it's lack of reference to and orientation for action)?
- *politically* (i.e. considering it's global to local institutionalization and status as a hegemonic discourse)?

¹ https://www.nachhaltig-forschen.de/assets/lena_nachhaltig-forschen/Dokumente/LeNa-Handreichung_final.pdf