



# Event Report Summer School 2025

“Justice in an interlinked  
world: revisiting rural-urban  
and South-North  
relationships in  
sustainability  
transformations”

9 – 11 September 2025  
Leibniz Institute of  
Ecological Urban and  
Regional Development  
(IOER) in Dresden, Germany

# IMPRINT

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## About "Leibniz Sustain"

The Leibniz Research Network "Knowledge for Sustainable Development" bundles and networks relevant research competencies in the Leibniz Association and contributes to the effectiveness and visibility of research for sustainable development. To this end, the network organises synthesis workshops, international conferences and summer schools in cooperation with other Leibniz institutions and external partners from science and practice, as well as future dialogues with influential personalities from politics, business and society.



To learn more about the network on its website: <https://www.leibniz-sustain.de/en>

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# 1 Introduction

To reflect upon and deepen our collective understandings of justice in sustainability transformation, we organized **a three day summer school** hosted by the [Leibniz Institute of Ecological Urban and Regional Development \(IOER\)](#) in cooperation with the [Leibniz-Centre for Agricultural Landscape Research \(ZALF\)](#), the Special Interest Group on Justice, Power and Transformative Action in Sustainability ([JUPITA](#), Copernicus Institute of Sustainable Development, Utrecht University), and the Thematic Group Equity and Justice (Ju-ST) ([Sustainability Transitions Research Network](#)). Members of the organising team were:

- Franziska Ehnert, Leibniz Institute of Ecological Urban and Regional Development (IOER)
- Neelakshi Joshi, Leibniz Institute of Ecological Urban and Regional Development (IOER)
- Marina Novikova, Leibniz Institute of Ecological Urban and Regional Development (IOER)
- Kristina Bogner, Copernicus Institute of Sustainable Development, Utrecht University
- Lasse Loft, Leibniz-Centre for Agricultural Landscape Research (ZALF)
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This inter- and transdisciplinary training and networking event provided an excellent opportunity for engaged participants to learn about, and co-develop new robust understandings of justice in an interlinked world. We achieved this through a mix of lectures, creative formats and group work, involving senior international experts.



Image Credit: H. Hensel/IOER Media

## 2 Theme

The burdens and benefits of, as well as the recognition and participation in sustainability transformations remain unequally distributed across rural/urban, global South/North communities, leading to spatial injustices and peripheralization. On the one hand, urban/Northern communities are lauded for rapidly moving towards renewable energy or vegan diets, seen as important aspects of sustainability transformations. On the other hand, rural/Southern lands and bodies are being increasingly engaged, willingly or unwillingly, to make transformations happen. The Summer School 2025 addressed this spatial unevenness from a diversity of justice perspectives, widening the focus from distribution, recognition and participation to especially intersectionality and restoration. We developed a critical understanding of socio-spatial relationships through inter- and transdisciplinary exchanges, as well as analyse (in)justices arising from processes of socio-spatial transformations across diverse contexts and communities. Through contextualisation, we highlighted the causes of (in)justices, ambivalences and paradoxes in rural-urban and South-North relationships, and the reproduction and reinforcement of (in)justices. By encouraging reflection, we developed approaches to undo injustices.

We combined conceptual introductions with the presentation of empirical examples and interactive workshops to give participants the opportunity to expand their knowledge of the literature on (in)justices and spatial unevenness and learn methods of critical reflection on normative concepts (rooted in critical social science skills). Furthermore, participants expanded their knowledge of transdisciplinary research approaches and tested methodological approaches of co-creation with societal actors, in particular artistic interventions. Such embodied practices opened up spaces for (un)learning and (un)doing.

The **guiding questions** for the Summer School 2025 were:

- What do we know about rural-urban and South-North relationships in late capitalism?
- What is the relationship between activities within cores and peripheries, where sustainability transformations sometimes strengthen cores at the expense of peripheries?
- What are the drivers of injustices, and how can those injustices be undone?
- How to contextualise and historicize justice claims to recognise and address the role of colonialism, extractivism and dispossession?

### 3 Event programme

#### Day 1: Tuesday, September 9th

09:00 CEST	Welcome & Opening
10:00 CEST	<i>Coffee Break</i>
10:30 CEST	Justice Circle Practice
12:00 CEST	<i>Lunch Break</i>
13:00 CEST	<b>Researching Justice in Sustainability Transitions</b> Flor Avelino
14:30 CEST	<i>Break</i>
15:00 CEST	Working Session
16:30 CEST	Transfer
17:00 CEST	Excursion to Cross River Coffee
18:00 CEST	<i>Dinner at Cross River Coffee (optional, self-paid basis)</i>

#### Day 2: Wednesday, September 10th

09:00 CEST	<b>Grassroots Pathways to Infrastructural and Environmental Justice: Toward Plural and Emancipatory Futures</b> Elia Apostolopolu
10:30 CEST	<i>Coffee Break</i>
11:00 CEST	Working Session
12:00 CEST	<i>Lunch Break</i>
13:00 CEST	Transfer
13:30 CEST	Workshop: Theatre of the Oppressed (tjg – Theatre of the Young Generation)
18:30 CEST	<i>Joint Dinner: Bailando (Grand Garden)</i>

## Event programme (Continued)

### Day 3: Thursday, September 11th

09:00 CEST	<b>Contextualising Justice: Decolonial perspectives on sustainability and transformation</b> Neha Mungekar
10:30 CEST	<i>Coffee Break</i>
11:00 CEST	Working Session
12:30 CEST	<i>Lunch Break</i>
13:30 CEST	Synthesis and Future Directions: Key Learnings on Just Sustainability Transformations in an Interlinked World
15:00 CEST	<i>Coffee Break</i>
15:30 CEST	Feedback & Farewell

## 4 Lectures

### Researching Justice in Sustainability Transitions

Prof. Dr. Flor Avelino

Prof. Dr. Flor Avelino is a researcher and lecturer on just sustainability transitions and social innovation currently working at the Copernicus Institute of Sustainable Development at Utrecht University.

#### **Her lecture: Researching Justice in Sustainability Transitions**

*"How can we research justice in sustainability transitions? In this session, we introduce the notion of 'just sustainability transitions' (JUSTRA) as a way to bridge the fields of sustainability transitions, environmental justice, just transitions as well as several domain specific justice studies (e.g. energy justice, food justice, urban justice etc.) and more critical debates coming from feminist, decolonial and anti-capitalist literatures. We shortly discuss three dimensions of justice (procedural, distributive and procedural) in combination with five additional concepts (intersectionality, capabilities, epistemology, spatiality and temporality). Furthermore, we argue how and why just sustainability transitions require an engagement with politics, power and prefiguration and how we can employ different modes of inquiry (analysis, critique and design) to study transformation toward more justice and sustainability."*



Image Credit: H. Hensel/IOER Media

## Grassroots Pathways to Infrastructural and Environmental Justice: Toward Plural and Emancipatory Futures

Dr. Elia Apostolopoulu

Dr. Elia Apostolopoulou is a Senior Lecturer at the Centre for Environmental Policy, at Imperial College London.

### **Her lecture: Grassroots Pathways to Infrastructural and Environmental Justice: Toward Plural and Emancipatory Futures**

*"In this talk, I explore how grassroots struggles across diverse contexts are bridging concerns of infrastructural and environmental justice. In an era marked by overlapping crises, infrastructures have become key battlegrounds—where austerity, ecological degradation and speculative, profit-driven development converge to reshape the sociomaterial conditions of life. I reflect on how communities contest these forces through everyday practices of care, repair, innovation and collective action, challenging dominant models of economic development and growth rooted in extraction and exclusion. Drawing on critical geographies and political ecologies of infrastructure and justice, I argue for a reimagining of infrastructure as a terrain of political struggle and collective world-making. Grassroots praxis, I suggest, should be understood not only as resistance, but as the articulation of imaginative blueprints for just, plural and livable futures."*



Image Credit: H. Hensel/IOER Media

## Contextualising Justice: Decolonial perspectives on sustainability and transformation

Dr. Neha Mungekar

Dr. Neha Mungekar is a researcher at IHE Delft Institute for Water Education is based in Delft, the Netherlands.

### **Her lecture: Contextualising Justice: Decolonial perspectives on sustainability and transformation**

*“Contemporary sustainability transformations often risk reinforcing the very injustices they claim to address, especially in postcolonial contexts where histories of extraction and dispossession remain deeply entrenched. This session responds to the growing imperative to contextualise and historicise justice claims by centring coloniality, extractivism, and intergenerational dispossession as key forces shaping climate and sustainability injustices. Drawing on empirical studies from India and comparing them to European contexts, we will examine how transformative agendas, often developed in the Global North, are disseminated into resource-constrained and culturally complex Southern settings, frequently prioritising technocratic optimisation over socio-political reparation.”*



Image Credit: H. Hensel/IOER Media

## 5 Working Sessions

The lectures were punctuated by group work sessions where the participants progressively engaged with the guiding questions and talked about their ongoing research projects. This included engaging with the Justice Circle Practice developed by the Doing Justice Collective as well as a session on diverse dimensions of justice and their interconnectedness led by Kristina Bogner. Participants were also requested to prepare short posters of their ongoing research which were displayed during the summer school and formed the basis of framing discussions and exchanging ideas and concepts.



Image Credit: H. Hensel/IOER Media

## 6 Excursions

We organised three excursions as part of the summer school for the participants to engage with local and regional initiatives that are undoing rigid relationships and reworking sustainability. These included:

### **Cross River Coffee/Deutschland-Nkambé e. V. with Wilson Tanto Ndzi**

Wilson Tanto Ndzi is a Cameroonian (precisely from Nkambe) who now lives in Dresden, where he blends passion with purpose. In 2017, Bongabee – Cameroon Coffee Project was founded to import high-quality Arabica beans directly from smallholder farms in Nkambe including his parents. Since 2018, his company, Cross River Coffee, roasts these beans in Dresden using a drum roaster and serving both as brewed or whole beans in many locations. His focus and wish are not just to improve the standards of the coffee growers in Cameroon but also link up everyone in the chain from farmers to drink lovers. Wilson provided an overview of his work followed by a discussion with the participants.



Image Credit: M. Novikova

## Workshop: Aesthetics of Solidarity with Kuringa e. V.

The Theatre of the Oppressed raises questions, develops images, explores different perspectives and celebrates the aesthetics of theatre as a space for encounter and transformation. In this workshop, the participants engaged with an aesthetic exercise in which they developed creative alternatives for transforming reality. They worked with a repertoire of exercises, games, and original techniques featured in the book "TEATRO DE LAS OPRIMIDAS: Feminist Aesthetics for a Political Poetics" written by Bárbara Santos.

KURINGA has become a center for training in the Theatre of the Oppressed, a space for rehearsals and public performances of Forum Theatre groups, as well as a venue for other events related to theatre and the aesthetics of the oppressed. The workshop was led by Eva Gloria – Theater pedagogue specialized in Theatre of the Oppressed and Teatro de las Oprimidas. Eva is part of Madalena-Berlin and Kuringa.



Image Credit: F. Ehnert

## Do-it-together Dinner with Bailando & Local Food Initiatives

Manuela Jacobs and Ronny Zenker are actively committed to promoting food appreciation and fighting food waste in Dresden. With the help of the Tafel e.V., foodsharing, and Ronny's initiative "Bailando", they rescue food from being discarded, turn it into delicious meals, and offer workshops on sustainable food use. Manuela also founded "Stadtwurm" – a project that transforms organic waste using compost worms into nutrient-rich humus, creating local and climate-friendly material cycles. Both are involved in organizations such as the Dresden Food Council, Dresden's Consumers' Cooperative (VG), and the Dresden Garden Network, all of which work towards sustainable and regional food production and supply. These networks connect stakeholders from politics, administration, agriculture, business, gastronomy and civil society to collaboratively shape a future-proof food system. Manuela and Ronny provided insights into their work and led a discussion about environmentally responsible food consumption. Together with the participants, we prepared a dinner with rescued foods.

## 7 Feedback

The Summer School 2025 was praised for its exceptional organisation, blending lectures, working groups, and excursions combined into a well-balanced and stimulating programme. Participants highlighted the high quality of speakers and the thought-provoking debates that arose, enriching their academic experience. The international and interdisciplinary mix of attendees fostered valuable networking and fresh perspectives on individual research projects. Excursions to local initiatives and cultural sites were especially appreciated for their inspiring, real-world insights into justice in an interlinked world. This is what participants say:

"Brilliantly organised with so many thoughtful touches. The days were very well structured, great balance between lectures, working groups and excursions, delicious food!"

"The summer school was wonderfully organised – stimulating, very good speakers and a super good selection of participants. Thank you!"

"The organisation was outstanding. I thoroughly enjoyed the way everything was planned and the proportions of all activities."

"The school's organisation was great. It offered a very rich and intense programme and ways to connect with other researchers."

"I thought all the talks were really thought provoking and useful. I liked that some of them sparked controversial debate."

"The working sessions were an opportunity for reflection. It helped me to reflect together with others about my personal research project. More importantly, the fact that these participants did not previously know about my project and brought in new interdisciplinary dimension to it was really satisfying for me."

"The excursions to Wilson's coffee and Kuringa, and the dinner with Bailando felt like a dive into what real life initiatives towards justice and sustainability look like - much appreciated and well thought!"

"[...] the excursion to the theatre was amazing! It was very powerful and surely something I would never forget."

"Overall, I must say that I felt highly motivated after school and it really sparked some enthusiasm in me."

## 8 Readings

### Day 1

Avelino, F., Wijsman, K., van Steenberg, F., Jhagroe, S., Wittmayer, J., Akerboom, S., ... & Kalfagianni, A. (2024). Just sustainability transitions: politics, power, and prefiguration in transformative change toward justice and sustainability. *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, 49. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-environ-112321-081722>

EEA (2024), Delivering justice in sustainability transitions, Briefing by the European Environment Agency, Published 28 Feb 2024, <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/delivering-justice-in-sustainability-transitions/>

Kaiser, Birgit M., Kathrin Thiele, Esther F. Jansen, Arianna Paterino, Flor Avelino, and Katinka Wijsman (2025), Power and Polycrisis: On the Durability of Capitalism-Patriarchy-Colonialism (CPC), *Journal of Political Power*, (18:1: 147-164) <https://doi.org/10.1080/2158379X.2025.2453234>.

### Day 2

Apostolopoulou, E., et al. (2022). Radical social innovations and the spatialities of grassroots activism: navigating pathways for tackling inequality and reinventing the commons. *Journal of Political Ecology* 29, 143-188.

Apostolopoulou, E. (2024). The dragon's head or Athens' sacrifice zone? Spatiotemporal disjuncture, logistical disruptions, and urban infrastructural justice in Piraeus port, Greece. *Urban Geography*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2024.2433968>.

Apostolopoulou, E., Liodaki, D. (2025). Austerity infrastructure, gentrification, and spatial violence: A ceaseless battle over urban space in exarcheia neighbourhood. *Antipode*, 57(1), 5-30.

## Day 3

Forsyth, M., Pali, B., & Tepper, F. (2022). Environmental restorative justice: An introduction and an invitation. In *The Palgrave handbook of environmental restorative justice* (pp. 1-23). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Mungekar, N., Hölscher, K., Janssen, A., & Loorbach, D. (2025). Repairing urban water governance through informality: comparing governance capacities for reparation in Indian cities. *Water Policy*, 27(4), 521-539.

Ghosh, B., Ramos-Mejía, M., Machado, R. C., Yuana, S. L., & Schiller, K. (2021). Decolonising transitions in the Global South: Towards more epistemic diversity in transitions research. *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions*, 41, 106-109.

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