

## Transformations in the Perspective of Individual Learning and Communication

### PhD 01b: Learning

#### *Transformative Learning in Real-World Laboratories (Working Title)*

#### *Rationale*

The PhD work in this perspective engages with the question of to what extent learning takes place in transformative settings in the textile sector and how insights from learning theory can help to enable sustainability transformations. It is informed by an understanding of transformation processes as a form of transformative learning both of individuals and groups. The research interest is to better understand how innovative and newly emerging approaches of production and consumption in the textile sector trigger and enable transformative learning and how such learning can be best supported to ultimately lead to more sustainable production and consumption patterns in the textile sector.

#### *Background / State of Research*

Innovative business models, crowd-sourcing approaches and multi-sided platforms as well as emerging new trends in consumption patterns such as swapping platforms or new forms of P2P interaction are considered as drivers for more sustainable production and consumption patterns in the textile sector (Muthu 2016). Consequently, the appearance of such models and approaches has gained increasing interest in both the policy and scholarly communities as key characteristics of transformation processes in this sector. In sustainability science, different approaches focus on such examples of transformation processes, for example transition management (Lorbach 2010) or real-world laboratory research (Schaepeke et al. 2015). These approaches often are informed by specific (disciplinary) perspectives and focus inter alia on drivers and barriers of transformation, the interaction of stakeholders or negotiation processes among actors. While this helps to better understand the potential of a case to transform, few approaches so far investigated the transformative impact on those involved in such cases. Here, the concept of transformative learning (Mezirow 1997, Koller 2012) offers helpful insights from a learning science perspective. Transformative learning theory focus on three dimensions of perspective transformation: changes in understanding of the self, revision of belief systems, and changes in lifestyle. In education for sustainability transformative learning is considered as key to being able to contribute to a more sustainable development (Sterling 2001, Wals 2011). However, how such transformative learning takes place and can be supported still remains largely a research desideratum.

#### *Approach and Research Design*

Work will be structured as a multi-step research approach. As a first step the concept of transformative learning will be adopted to sustainability-related real-world laboratory settings. Based on relevant literature from learning science, education for sustainable development and theories of informal learning an appropriate theoretical framework for the further investigation will be developed. In a second step, relevant cases of production and consumption in the textile sector will be identified and theoretically sampled to be studied in a comparative exploratory case study. In this step, special attention will be given to the occasions in which transformative learning occurs, as well as the drivers and barriers of such learning. Thirdly and finally an intervention study is conducted to explore how insights from a learning perspective can help

to overcome barriers and shortcomings derived from the previous case study to contribute to sustainability transformations within production and consumption patterns in the textile sector.

*Expected Results*

With the focus on learning processes this PhD complements the perspective of communication processes. Integration across these perspectives will explore the interconnectedness of individual and social learning, communication contexts and social interaction. Furthermore, insights into the potential of transformative learning in the textile sector, its drivers and barriers and possible intervention points resulting from this perspective will provide valuable reference points for other perspectives (e.g. transdisciplinary negotiation, politics) and will ultimately lead to a more robust understanding of sustainability transformations in that area.

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