

# HCE NEWSLETTER 01.07.2024

Dear HCE members,

ahead of the summer break, we would like to share some of the most important highlights of the first half of 2024 with you. It has been a very busy time; many exciting events have taken place and new cooperation partners have joined our growing community.

Currently, we are preparing for our next HCE General Assembly (July 19<sup>th</sup>, online) and the forthcoming HCE Retreat (October 8<sup>th</sup> - 9<sup>th</sup>, in presence), where we will have time for stimulating exchange on HCE's future. Already today, we wish you an inspiring summer break and we look forward to working with you in the winter semester 2024/25.

Your HCE Office

## Follow up on the HI4CA initiative – Rewiring Climate.Action.Science.

On February 7<sup>th</sup>, you have all been informed about the outcome of the DFG review of our CRC initiative “Hyperlocal information for climate action” (HI4CA). Meanwhile, a written report was provided by the DFG, giving the reasons for the decline. Our interdisciplinary HI4CA consortium continues to believe in the project and will revise the proposal. Several smaller projects have been initiated with the aim to provide a more solid base for our guiding hypothesis. Most recently, upon a call from the rectorate, HCE has submitted an idea for a future flagship initiative (tentative title “Climate.Action.Science.”), harnessing additional expertise from the Heidelberg Institute of Global Health (HIGH), Heidelberg Center for Ibero-American Studies (HCIAS), and the Faculty of Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Computer Sciences. This initiative has been positively received by the University's Commission for Research and Strategy and is currently being further developed. Interdisciplinary research will remain high risk/high gain but is regarded as mandatory for addressing today's global changes.

## Update on new collaborative HCE projects 2024-2026

We are excited to announce the commencement of several new collaborative projects for the 2024-2026 period. These projects cover a wide range of environmental issues, from sustainable urban development to biodiversity conservation. Initial feedback from project teams has been overwhelmingly positive, highlighting the potential for groundbreaking research and impactful outcomes.



### **Restoring Nature: Implications for Biodiversity, Food Systems, and Nutrition Status**

Europe faces a critical challenge with over 80% of its habitats in poor condition, threatening biodiversity. In response, the European Union is negotiating a Nature Restoration Law (NRL) to restore degraded ecosystems by 2050. This ambitious regulation aims to enhance biodiversity, particularly in agricultural ecosystems, but faces significant opposition from various political and farming groups. The "Restoring Nature" project explores this issue from multiple perspectives, including political science, sociology, biology, and global/public health, to provide comprehensive insights into the multifaceted implications of nature restoration.

Key project members include Dr. Simon Schaub, Prof. Dr. Jale Tosun, Prof. Dr. Marcus Koch, Prof. Dr. Renata Motta, and Prof. Dr. Ina Danquah, with student assistant Fabio Klevenz. This interdisciplinary collaboration examines the policy process, food justice, impacts on wild flora biodiversity, and the link between biodiversity and nutrition status, aiming at offering a holistic understanding of the potential outcomes and challenges of nature restoration efforts in the EU. The HCE team is currently exploring to collaborate on this topic with partners from 4EU+ universities.



### **The Public Negotiation of Justice in Transitions to Sustainability**

In the debate over climate change mitigation, environmental protection, economic activities, and social equity, the concept of a just transition is gaining prominence. However, different stakeholders attribute varying, often conflicting, meanings to justice, leading to debates and conceptual ambiguity. This project aims to understand how these different

meanings of justice shape public policies related to sustainability transitions and impact citizen support. Focusing on Latin America and the Caribbean, particularly Chile, Colombia, and Argentina, it examines how governments, media, civil society, and the private sector frame just transitions and the implications for policy and societal pathways.

The project adopts an interdisciplinary approach, integrating knowledge from human geography, communication science, and political science. Led by Jun.-Prof. Dr. Alejandro Ecker, Jun.-Prof. Dr. Rosa Lehmann, and Jun.-Prof. Dr. Pablo Porten-Cheé, with Dr. Mariana Ramírez Bustamante and Alejandra Irigoyen, this research aims to shed light on the complex concept of just transitions and contribute to more informed policymaking and societal discourse. By exploring diverse interpretations and the sociospatial repercussions of just transition policies, the project seeks to enhance our understanding of how societies negotiate these transitions and how politics responds to this public negotiation.

## Book project “Umwelt Interdisziplinär”

We are delighted to inform you that the final contributions to the book "Umwelt interdisziplinär" have recently been [published online as preprints](#). We sincerely thank the editors Prof. Dr. Thomas Meier, Prof. Dr. Frank Keppler, Prof. Dr. Ute Mager, Prof. Dr. Ulrich Platt, and Prof. Dr. Friederike Reents who are currently compiling the index. The final contribution, "Interdisciplinarity," is undergoing its last revisions (it will not be published as a preprint). These tasks should be completed by the end of April, after which the manuscript will be sent to the publisher for printing. The illustrations are already under technical review. The contract for the final publication of the anthology will be sent to the authors shortly.



## Heidelberger Brücke colloquium series, summer term 2024 and beyond

The [Heidelberger Brücke colloquium](#) serves as a platform for interdisciplinary exchange and public engagement. This summer term's program, titled "*Catalyzing the Sustainability Transformation*", focuses on the social science dimensions of climate change. Renowned speakers include Prof. Dr. Marc-Philipp Weller, who discussed climate litigation, Romain Boitard, who elaborated on green jobs and green skills, and Prof. Dr. Susanne Mantel, who examined the ethics of climate change. These sessions provided valuable insights into the university's sustainability initiatives and future measures.

Under the motto “*The Power of Innovation for Sustainability*”, the winter term will continue the well-received format of “learn at lunch” and again offer a mixture of key note presentations with discussion, alternating with panel formats. Local and international speakers are currently being invited and the program will soon be finalized.

## Forthcoming workshop on “Hydrosocial dynamics in energy transitions”

Although a broad body of literature from various disciplines such as engineering, economics, law, and geography has extensively explored issues of water scarcity, water security, and water governance, there has been limited focus on the dynamics of water demand and availability. Additionally, the interdependencies between water and resources required for energy transitions are often overlooked. With the increasing demand for water due to lithium extraction, renewable energy, and hydrogen production, the hydrosocial cycle is influenced by numerous actors, political interests, and financial flows, all under the guise of reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

The demand for and pressure on water resources is heightened by these activities, impacting hydrosocial territories. Therefore, the workshop organized by Johanna Höhl and Tobias Zumbärgel brings together researchers, policy stakeholders, and practitioners to address key questions: How is water use integrated into global energy transition strategies, and what factors influence decision-making at different scales? In water-scarce regions like Latin America and the MENA, how do renewable energy projects and resource extraction affect water resources and hydrosocial relations? What role do economic and financial resources play in shaping these reconfigurations during the energy transition, and how can sociopolitical contexts and local alternatives be considered in decision-making processes regarding water access and use?



## HCE transfer activities in 2024

We played a key role in organizing the [launch event for the Lancet Countdown on Climate Change and Health Europe](#), held at the Aula of the Alte Universität in June 2024. The event was primarily organized by Joacim Rocklöv's team, particularly Hedi Krit, in collaboration with KLUG (Deutsche Allianz Klimawandel und Gesundheit), and it provided crucial insights into the intersection of climate change and health, underscoring the urgent need for action.

Additionally, we are proud to announce the launch of the Certificate of Advanced Studies in Sustainable Leadership by HeiSkills, Momentum Novum, HCE, and Klima Arena. The program is designed to equip leaders with the knowledge and skills necessary to drive sustainable practices in their organizations.

Moreover, as part of HCE's membership in the German Climate Consortium (DKK), Executive Director Thomas Rausch and Executive Manager Max Jungmann participated in this year's membership assembly and annual conference, strengthening our relationships with key member institutions of the DKK.

Last but not least, HCE's contribution to last year's Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was a resounding success. HCE Executive Manager Max Jungmann led an official UNFCCC side event on climate change and health, together with Rainer Sauerborn, Trish Schwerdtle, Aline Hermann, Noemi Bender, and others from Heidelberg University, as well as Science Po and other partner universities. Moreover, Max Jungmann spoke at a panel discussion at the BeNeLux pavillon on lessons learned from the floods in Western Germany in 2021, and HCE members Tobias Zumbärgel, Trish Schwerdtle, Sandra Barteit, Marco Teixeira, and Rainer Sauerborn spoke at other side events and panel discussions. Plans for COP 29 in Baku are already under way.



## HCE coordinates the University's Sustainability Think Tank

In 2023, the Commission for Research and Strategy had commissioned HCE to coordinate the newly founded **Sustainability Think Tank (STT)**, a participatory and multi-stakeholder initiative for developing recommendations for the University's Sustainability Strategy. Since December 2023, five working groups, i.e. research, teaching, communication & transfer, general operation and research operation, meet monthly to discuss ideas for and strategic aspects of the envisaged comprehensive Sustainability Strategy. The STT plenum is convened twice each semester to exchange obtained ideas and results. The STT process is organized and coordinated by Irina Merz, with support from the central HCE management. Continuous exchange with the newly appointed Prorektor for Quality Development and Sustainability (Prof. Dr. Karin Schumacher) assures smooth alignment of bottom up with top down initiatives, and the close communication with the climate manager (Narasimha Sushil, Space and Energy Department) guarantees effective interplay between academic and administration staff. It is anticipated that the STT will provide to the rectorate its recommendations for the strategic sustainability document by end of 2024. The "work in progress" of the STT can be followed [on its homepage](#), and all university members are invited to contribute.

## Interdisciplinary PhD training initiatives – Outlook

The HCE continues to support interdisciplinary PhD training through various initiatives such as Heidelberg College, Collegio Futuro, C-NEWTRAL, and the Green Deal Net. These programs provide valuable training opportunities for the next generation of environmental scientists and leaders, fostering interdisciplinary research and collaboration.

While HCE college provides a continuous exchange format for local PhD students interested in interdisciplinary exchange, Collegio Futuro offers a yearly summer (or winter/spring) school for PhD students from universities of the 4EU+ consortium under the thematic umbrella of flagship 4 “Environmental transitions”; the next spring school is planned for early 2025. Together with two other EU-funded initiatives, i.e. the MSCA Doctoral Networks initiative C-NEWTRAL with contribution from Ulrike Gerhard (focus on C-neutral mobility), and the Green Deal Net program coordinated by Jale Tosun, HCE researchers are actively engaged in providing attractive formats for international exchange.

## Expanding HCE infrastructure – Challenges of a gradual growth process

As HCE continues to grow, we face challenges related to personnel, space, and basic funding. We are in constant communication with the rectorate to address these issues, ensuring that our expansion supports our mission and enhances our research capabilities.