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Brandenburgische Technische Universität Cottbus - Senftenberg
AlterPerimentale
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Call for Abstracts

# Transdisciplinarity, co-creativity and transfer: social science research and transformational practices in rural and regional contexts

**Workshop at Technical University Vienna, June 11/12, 2026 | Submission deadline: 15 January, 2026**

**Organizers:**
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With the increasing importance of transdisciplinarity and the so-called third mission at universities and research institutes, transfer formats are becoming more significant also in social sciences. In this call we refer in particular to urban/regional sociology, spatial planning, and social work. While transfer in the fields of technological and economical research is associated with the market maturity of innovative products or the founding of start-ups or spin-offs from universities and institutes, the concept of transfer in the social sciences is still rather vague (Compagnucci & Spigarelli 2020). Although the field of social entrepreneurship is growing, start-ups in rural areas tend to be in the manufacturing sector and are generally more stable than in cities, as shown for Germany (Simmler & Garcia Dominguez 2025). In addition, co-creative transdisciplinary formats such as living labs for the creation of innovations have been established for some time (e.g. Marvin et al. 2018; Turnhout et al. 2020; Pentzold et al. 2023) though in the meantime labs have been criticized because of their tendency to 'technocratize' political decision making (Evans & Karvonen 2014) or because they miss to link with wider governance (Hodson et al. 2018). Furthermore, social sciences are often primarily assigned the role of accompaniment and limited to foster acceptance. In urban living labs and other transdisciplinary formats in cities, on the other hand, social sciences often play an active role, which is also widely discussed (e.g. Frehse et al. 2025). Far less attention is paid to transdisciplinary research and transfer in rural areas and larger regional contexts.

However, considering profound social, ecological, and economic transformations, rural areas and regions are increasingly the focus of both scholarly inquiry and practice-oriented research. The current challenges of socio-spatial transformation processes cannot be overcome by technical innovations alone. The focus is thus shifting to co-creative social innovations that are driven by cross-sector collaborations (Blanchet 2024). Addressing complex challenges (e.g. decarbonisation, demographic change, aging and care, growing spatial and social inequalities, community re-development, etc.) requires not only disciplinary expertise, but also transdisciplinary collaboration. Social sciences—particularly sociology, planning studies, and social work—play a crucial role in fostering integrative knowledge production and facilitating transformative processes in collaboration with diverse actors. However, representatives of these different disciplines often have different languages and reference systems, which differ even more from those of their non-scientific colleagues.

Against the background of these considerations, the social sciences must reflect, specify and establish their own transfer formats and strengthen their role in inter- as well as in transdisciplinary research processes to tackle transformational needs in rural and larger regional contexts. Creative participatory research methods can be used to support and generate social innovations on site, which materialize in new services adapted to local needs and conditions, value creation and future-oriented civic engagement. This in turn can feed new knowledge into research processes. However, there is also a risk that co-creation, transdisciplinarity and transfer will degenerate into empty words in the context of research policy strategies, not least because clear impact measurements are often impossible, still underdeveloped or in develpoment (e.g. Fischer et al. 2025). At the same time, parts of the population are becoming increasingly skeptical about science and research; and co-creation initiatives are increasingly being discussed against the backdrop of the danger of de-politicization or their failing (Turnhout et al. 2020).

Against this backdrop, the call invites contributions that critically engage with the potentials and challenges of transdisciplinary research and transfer in rural and larger regional contexts. We seek to explore how collaborative research across disciplinary (especially sociology, planning and social work) and institutional boundaries can generate socially robust knowledge, inform planning and governance, and contribute to the co-production of solutions in rural regions. The workshop aims to bring together theoretical and conceptual perspectives, methodological approaches, case studies and empirical examples to, also critically, discuss and systematise current debates on the role of co-creative research and transfer processes to generate social innovation and transformational outcomes

Possible topics include (but are not limited to):

- The role of universities and research institutes in negotiating and organizing transfer in the field of social innovations in rural areas and larger regional contexts;
- Co-Creation and participation as modes of transdisciplinary transfer in rural and regional contexts;
- Conceptual and practical contributions to distinguishing between transdisciplinarity, transfer, and third mission for the social sciences, and/or the relationship between transfer, co-creative practical research, and sustainable structural strengthening in rural regions;
- Ethics, politics, methodological and theoretical approaches to co-creative transfer practices and social innovation;
- Socio-economic interfaces as arenas for shaping effective scientific transfer processes;
- Evaluation and risk management of social innovation and co-creative transfer in rural and regional contexts;
- Co-creative practices and transfer formats in interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research on specific rural and regional challenges (e.g. demographic change, decarbonisation, community development, etc.);
- Interdisciplinary experiences in rural areas and regions between planning, sociology and social work, and the respective disciplinary self-image, which may be challenged in the process.

**Submission**

Please, send your abstracts by **January 15, 2026**, to vienna@alterperimentale.de

You will receive notification of acceptance by February 15, 2026.

The abstract should be no longer than 500 words, including the title. In addition, please note the names and affiliations of the contributors.

**Workshop**

The one-and-a-half-day workshop will take place on June 11-12, 2026, at Technical University Vienna and is a collaboration with the transfer initiative "Alterperimentale" led by BTU Cottbus-Senftenberg.

The aim is to engage in dialogue with each other via the submitted papers and thus contribute to a common understanding of transdisciplinarity, co-creativity and transfer for rural and regional contexts.

The results of the workshop will be published in a Special Issue.

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