

The **INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE AND SUSTAINABILITY (IGN)** at Vienna University of Economics and Business (**WU Vienna**) invites applications for a

Predoc Position in a Research Project

(75% FTE).

Starting from **January 1st, 2019**, the appointment will be fixed term, limited to **3 years**. The gross monthly salary, paid 14 times per year, is € 2.095,95 (recognition of previous employment - if relevant to the advertised position – is possible).

Area of responsibility

- Contributing to the research project *Urban Experiments in Socio-Ecological Change. The Smart City and Urban Degrowth Spaces* (see project description below or under IGN "News": www.wu.ac.at/en/ign/institute-head/news/)
- Writing a doctoral thesis that relates to the research project and/or the IGN agenda (see IGN Academic Mission Statement: www.wu.ac.at/en/ign/academic-mission-statement)
- Literature reviews and empirical research
- Contributing to publications as well as publishing independently
- Co-organizing international conferences and events at the IGN
- Presenting at conferences and outreach to media

Your Profile

- Strong BA and MA degree in the social sciences
- Relevant prior knowledge in one or more of the following areas: environmental sociology, sustainability, urban studies, social and/or political theory
- Experience in empirical social research
- Excellent command of English and German
- Experience that relates to the above mentioned responsibilities
- Familiarity with the IGN agenda (see IGN Website: www.wu.ac.at/en/ign)
- Excellent organizational skills
- Good communication and teamwork skills

The required application materials – **letter of intent, exposé of PhD project** (max. 3 pages), **CV**, and **copies of university degrees** – can be submitted online **until November 7, 2018** at the following web address: www.wu.ac.at/jobs (Reference Number 3753).

For informal inquiries, please contact the project leader and head of the IGN, Professor Ingolfur Blühdorn.

Research Project Description:

Urban Experiments for Socio-Ecological Transformation: The Smart City and Degrowth Spaces
(funded by the FWF Austria, 2018 -2021)

There is mounting scientific evidence that the environment is in a state of emergency and that making fundamental changes to how humans relate to it is more urgent than ever. Yet, precisely at a time when decisive action is imperative, confidence in established tools for action is crumbling. The sustainability paradigm – the hegemonic eco-political frame for almost 30 years – is increasingly perceived as having failed to deliver major socio-ecological change. Political institutions and civil society – traditionally perceived as key drivers of change – seem unable to generate and maintain the required political momentum. This leaves contemporary societies with a formidable dilemma which might give reasonable cause for disillusionment about the very possibility of breaking with “sustained unsustainability” (Blühdorn). In recent years, however, new confidence in socio-ecological transformation has emerged at a scale one might consider to be of secondary importance to tackling global crises: the city.

Especially two innovative urban experiments for socio-ecological transformation have become prominent: the smart city and degrowth spaces, such as repair cafés, sharing platforms, urban agriculture, food co-ops and co-housing projects. The smart city seeks to re-instill confidence in techno-scientific innovation and Green growth. It considers urban everyday life as a promising “living laboratory” in which techno-scientific and policy innovations are co-developed and tested with local stakeholders. Degrowth spaces, in contrast, suggest breaking with growth-related norms, values, and lifestyles in favor of sufficiency-, community-, and solidarity-driven ways of consuming, producing, and living. But beyond their significant differences, there is also a common denominator: Both trust in *local* (rather than national and transnational) intervention and in *experimental* (rather than end-of-the-pipe) solutions.

While the smart city and degrowth spaces are typically regarded as competing responses to the socio-ecological dilemma, this research project is inspired by the commonalities and studies them conjointly. Its goal is to provide an empirically and theoretically grounded account of the emergence, the hopes attached to, the transformative potentials of the *trend towards localism and experimentalism* in current responses to the global socio-ecological crisis. Yet, one of the project’s preliminary suspicions is that localism and experimentalism may be *strategies of coping with*, rather than of *transforming*, unsustainable relations to the environment. Methodologically, we draw on multimodal discourse analysis of flagship smart city and degrowth experiments in Vienna as well as a critical engagement with contemporary debates on post-sustainability, environmental (urban) governance, and socio-political and economic developments. Given the continued worsening of the socio-ecological crises *despite* an abundance of proposed solution, this project takes a step back from promising, quick solutions to delivering a better understanding of current socio-political conditions for transformative change.

About the INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE AND SUSTAINABILITY (IGN):

The **IGN** explores the interdependence of the development of modern societies and their discourses and politics of sustainability. It approaches issues of sustainability, which elsewhere are often addressed from a natural sciences', economic or technological point of view, from an explicitly social scientific perspective.

Social change is not primarily a normative demand for us, but we conceptualise it first and foremost as an ever evolving reality, the causes, implications and effects of which we only partially understand. Accordingly, our key question is how this evolutionary change constantly remoulds the conditions for a successful politics of sustainability, and how it changes the understanding of sustainability itself.

Sustainability we understand as an idea and project that is based on culturally determined and socially negotiated values and norms, which keep evolving as societal development proceeds: What is being considered as sustainable, where societal perceptions of unsustainability emerge, to what extent such perceptions trigger concern and to what kind of action such concerns may give rise are, to a considerable extent, matters for the sociological, cultural and political sciences. Exactly these questions inspire and power our academic enquiry. For further info on the IGN, see: www.wu.ac.at/IGN

We are looking forward to your application!