

## “Planet and Society: Bounding the Futures of Sustainability”

Annual Conference 2022

[Humanities Centre for Advanced Studies](#)

“Futures of Sustainability: Modernization, Transformation, Control“

31 May / 01 June 2022

[Warburg-Haus](#), Heilwigstraße 116, 20249 Hamburg

This conference will systematically connect the concepts of Planetary Boundaries and Futures of Sustainability. The notion of planetary boundaries has transformed imaginations of sustainable futures on this planet (Rockström et al 2009). Planetary boundaries are designed to explore possibilities for sustainable futures within the “safe operating space for humanity” (ibid.) on planet Earth. However, social actors and societies incorporate planetary boundaries in many different ways. Likewise, various actors in societies imagine and produce different “futures of sustainability” (Adloff/Neckel 2019) that rely on specific sets of imaginations, practices, and structures. Idealtypically, we can grasp the futures of sustainability as trajectories of modernization, transformation, and control. Modernization broadly refers to envisioning markets to develop technological solutions and green growth, enabling human survival within the confinement of the globe without drastic changes to the status quo. By contrast, futures of transformation urge the necessity of radical institutional changes as the only option to stay within the natural boundaries of the Earth. Futures of control aim at an authoritative state of instrumental measures, disciplining individual consumption and technologically intervening in the Earth system (ibid). Thus, futures of sustainability ground in making and marking boundaries, not only in the sense of creating and maintaining symbolic demarcations between conflicting futures of sustainability. Rather, they comprise the making and marking of planetary boundaries, which involves constructing normative future imaginations of the social, the natural and their interactions.

### *Examining external and internal boundaries*

In our annual conference “Planet and Society: Bounding the Futures of Sustainability” we want to explore these myriad social-ecological boundaries as well as the imaginations, practices and infrastructures that make, mark and maintain them. The conference therefore will analyze and critically examine the boundaries and limitations – set by the Earth system – of the three trajectories modernization, transformation, and control. On the one hand, thus, the respective translations of the seemingly external, i.e. objective and universalistic concept of planetary boundaries will be examined.

On the other hand, the internal limits inherent to each of the trajectories shall be explored. Limits to modernization could lie, for example, in a lack of technical innovation capacity or in so-called rebound effects, which prevent any substantial ecological modernization. A comprehensive transformation, however, runs the risk of being explored too slowly and in niches only, without enabling a timely change of direction in society as a whole. Inherent limits to authoritative control as a trajectory may lie, for one, in rule-of-law institutions and civil rights, and, for another, in the unruliness of the planetary system, which may not bow to the procedures of geo-engineering.

### **References**

- Adloff, Frank; Neckel, Sighard (2019): Futures of Sustainability as Modernization, Transformation and Control: A Conceptual Framework. In: *Sustainability Science* 14(4), p. 963-971.
- Rockström, Johan (2015): Bounding the planetary future: Why we need a great transition, online: <https://greattransition.org/publication/bounding-the-planetary-future-why-we-need-a-great-transition>, accessed: 12/20/2021.
- Rockström, Johan; Steffen Will; Noone, Kevin; Foley, Jonathan (2009): A safe operating space for humanity. In: *Nature* 461, p. 472-475.