



# IÖR-Forum

## Leverage Points for Sustainability Transformations

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In Autumn 2015, 7 colleagues and I launched the Leverage Points project as a response to our shared frustration at society's collective failure to engage with the root causes of unsustainability. We were committed to exploring how to intervene in systems in order to create transformations for sustainability. We drew on Donella Meadows' framework where she introduces the idea of leverage points as places to intervene in a system. In her essay, Meadows highlights that there are shallow leverage points, where intervening is easy, but unlikely to lead to transformational change; and there are deeper leverage points, which are less tangible but have a higher transformational potential. Our starting premise was that to date, sustainability research and policy tend to target the shallower, weaker leverage points, relating to the parameters and feedbacks within a system. We wanted to explore the deeper leverage points, relating to intent and design. Our study design included a focus on food and energy systems; including consideration of the knowledge, the governance structures and the relationships of people to nature within these systems, and transdisciplinary case studies to embed this research in Romania (Transylvania) and Germany (Lower Saxony).

As the project entered its final stages, societal discourse on climate change, biodiversity, and broader sustainability was shifting. 2019 saw the growth of Fridays for Future, civil disobedience from Extinction Rebellion, and a growing popular use of the phrase '6th mass extinction'. My favourite Fridays for Future chant is "systems change not climate change!". So HOW do we change the system?

In this presentation, I will draw on knowledge developed during the Leverage Points project (and beyond), and reflect on what we know about how to intervene for fundamental systems transformations. I will highlight the relevance to both the current climate change and biodiversity agendas. And I will conclude with thoughts on what it all means for what we research and how.

**Julia Leventon** holds a junior professorship in Sustainability Science at the Leuphana University, Lüneburg. Her research group focuses on place based sustainability research, with a particular interest in governance systems. Through the commitment to participatory place based research, the group is also developing the theory and practice of transdisciplinarity in sustainability science.

**Mittwoch**  
**22.01.2020**  
**15:00 Uhr**

Veranstaltungsort:  
Leibniz-Institut  
für ökologische  
Raumentwicklung  
Weberplatz 1  
01217 Dresden

**Moderation**  
Prof. Dr. Marc Wolfram

**Koordination**  
Dr. Andreas Otto





Julia has an interdisciplinary background, with a BSc in environmental Science, and an MSc in international development (both from the University of Manchester, UK). Prior to joining Leuphana, Julia gained a PhD at the Central European University in Budapest, and completed post docs at the Sustainability Research Institute at Leeds University, UK, and at Leuphana.

Julia's research to date has seen her engage with the most pressing environmental challenges of our age, including climate change, safe drinking water, sustainable food supplies and biodiversity conservation. She has a global focus in her work, conducting empirical work in Zambia, Malawi, Hungary, Romania, Sweden, Germany and the Czech Republic. Throughout her career, Julia has committed to meaningful engagement with the people and places in which she is working, and to co-creation of knowledge.

Most recently, Julia has been leading the Leverage Points project. The project engaged 8 professors, 5 post docs and 10 PhDs to explore systems transformation for sustainability. |