



Lecture Series *Transformations to Sustainability*



Sustainable Transitions in Urban Water: Insights from some social science perspectives

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Abstract: Urban water management related infrastructure is one of the major communal assets in Western countries. Historically, it played a decisive role in making urban areas livable places. However, more recently, experts increasingly question its longer-term sustainability because of high upfront investment costs, challenges provided by new contaminants and the inability to provide services to a majority of the global population. In the talk, I will argue that we are currently at the brink of a major sustainability transition in this sector both in OECD countries and in development contexts. I will first present how Eawag (Eidgenössische Anstalt für Wasserversorgung, Abwasserreinigung und Gewässerschutz) approached this topic by operating an inter- and transdisciplinary research platform over the last 25 years. More specifically, I will show what “sustainability transitions” research contributes to grasping the associated fundamental change processes. Insights from recent research on

global industry dynamics in modular water technologies, challenges to develop sustainable sanitation options in informal settlements in the Global South and economic assessment of the speed of a potential transition provide complementary perspectives on this transition.

Bernhard Truffer heads the environmental social science department at Eawag and is a professor for the “Geography of Transitions” at the Copernicus Institute of Sustainable Development at Utrecht University. Trained as an economic geographer, he published extensively on sustainability transitions in sectors like transport, energy and urban water. His research took place in Europe, California, Australia, China, South Africa and East Africa. He also has ample experience in conducting inter- and transdisciplinary research projects in Germany and Switzerland.

The lecture series *Transformations to Sustainability*. Sustainability implies a formidable challenge for a variety of fields. Buzzwords such as bioeconomy, energy transformation, green chemistry, agricultural turnaround or digitalization illustrate the multiple facets at play. Each of these – often deeply interwoven – aspects describe complex processes on their own. Beyond technological progress, transformations to sustainability also require broad societal and institutional change. Against this background, the lecture series *Transformation to Sustainability* reflects on the topic from manifold perspectives: What are the specific targets of transformation processes? How can sustainability targets be translated into viable transformation research programs? To what degree can the transformation processes be consciously managed? What are the main drivers or barriers of transformation and how do they vary in different contexts? The lecture series was initiated by the Thematic Area ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIETY to offer a comprehensive discussion platform, welcoming colleagues from all disciplines at UFZ. For further information contact the head of RU 6 Environment and Society: bernd.hansjuergens@ufz.de.