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CALL FOR APPLICATIONS 2026

Spatiality of sustainability-oriented innovation dynamics and transformation

Research on spatial dimensions of sustainability transformation, including innovation aspects, has been a growing field in the last decades. In the innovation studies and economic geography research, significant progress has been made on mapping and explaining the uneven geographical landscape of sustainability-oriented innovations. The latter is a broad taxonomic category including several widely used concepts (eco-innovation, environmental innovation, green innovation, clean innovation, sustainable innovation, etc.) that encompass technological, social and ecological innovations.

Key findings in this literature imply that:

- Sustainability-oriented innovations can emerge anywhere and are not limited to just a handful of leading locations, with significant potential particularly in developing countries;
- Similar to conventional technological innovations, the development, demonstration and implementation of sustainability-oriented innovations are supported by clustering effects as well as by the interaction between the quadruple helix components (science, industry, policy and civil society);
- The extent of knowledge spillovers in an urban or regional context influences the ability of actors to develop sustainability-oriented innovations;
- Normative orientation of innovations requires a leading role of government agencies (at different levels and spatial scales) and including broader constellations of actors in policy agenda-setting;
- Development and diffusion of sustainability-oriented innovations are conditioned by informal localised institutions, which also positively influence the push for the development and adoption of sustainability regulation.

However, many research gaps remain in this field. A key aim for science and policy alike is to better grasp the mutual interdependencies between the particular dynamics of sustainability-oriented innovation and spatial structures in order to shape forms of knowledge co-production and intervention that can purposefully drive transformations. Against this backdrop, the Dresden Leibniz Graduate School (DLGS) invites applications that strive to explore and explain these complex linkages.

Applicants may pursue projects focusing on one of the following topics:

- 1. Process Innovations and New Business Strategies in Companies:** Investigate if, why and how various types of business sectors and/or companies are redesigning production processes, strategies, and business models with a view to sustainability and how this relates to urban and/or regional restructuring.
- 2. Diffusion of Sustainability-Oriented Innovations:** Explore the mechanisms through which sustainability-oriented innovations are adopted, spread and scaled up across industries and spaces, considering especially the role of spatial factors in these processes.
- 3. Mission-Oriented and Transformative Innovation Policy:** Examine the emergence, creation and/or impacts of specific policies aimed at addressing societal challenges and supporting sustainability-oriented innovation activities, with a particular focus on their spatial conditions and effects.

This call is aimed at excellent graduates with a Master's degree in any field of pertinence for spatial sustainability transformations, such as business, economics, geography, urban/regional studies, transition studies, innovation studies, science-technology-policy, sociology, political science, among others. We invite innovative applications from outstanding candidates, originating from any country, meeting admission requirements at the TU Dresden.

To be eligible, proposals must address one of the above three topics and fulfil all other formal DLGS selection criteria:

- First Master's degree obtained in the last 3 years
- Total grade for the Master's degree "good" or higher (corresponding to German level "gut")
- Proposals must be fitted to one or several [IOER research areas](#)
- Applicants have identified suitable supervisors who are professors at the TU Dresden/IOER (it is not necessary to contact potential supervisors at this stage)
- The application form must include all required materials and be submitted online

Applicants are free to design the research proposal according to their particular competencies, experiences, and interests. Interdisciplinary approaches (across academic disciplines) and/or transdisciplinary work (involving both academic and non-academic actors) are strongly encouraged. In order to ensure feasibility, transdisciplinary proposals must however be linked to ongoing IOER projects in the Dresden/Saxony region (find in IOER research areas). In addition, applicants for transdisciplinary research must demonstrate German language proficiency (C1 level) for working with diverse local stakeholders.

If selected, the candidates will be offered a full-time scholarship for a duration of 3 years, with the possibility for extension. The DLGS scholarship amounts to €1,515 per month (in addition to support for travel and research activity expenses) and is on par with the German Research Foundation's (DFG) fellowship allowance for PhD candidates in Germany.

Application deadline: September 1, 2025

Start of the programme: March 1, 2026

For additional information please contact the DLGS Scientific Coordinator: **Dr. Nora Gortcheva**
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A detailed description of the application requirements and procedure can be found on the DLGS website:

www.dlgs-dresden.de

Excellence in Spatial Sustainability Science and Transformative Leadership

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The Dresden Leibniz Graduate School (DLGS) is a joint interdisciplinary facility of the Leibniz Institute of Ecological Urban and Regional Development, Dresden (IOER) and Dresden University of Technology (TUD).



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