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WINS Seminar

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Title of presentation: Transforming Development: The need for an Economic Paradigm Shift to move towards Sustainability

Abstract

The newly agreed 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide the normative framework against which policy decisions and measuring of progress on sustainable development take place. Three principles lie at its core: universality – all countries should report on their progress in changing towards more sustainable societies, integration – despite them being 17 goals they should form a programmatic agenda that aligns social and economic goals with environmental concerns, and transformation – acknowledgement that no existing development model is sustainable. This leads to two key research questions that I would like to address:

1. *If the changes envisioned by the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda are supposed to be transformational in quality, how do we work towards this quality?*
2. *If the transformations envisioned are supposed support sustainable development, what are the key leverage points to unlock unsustainable path dependencies?*

Combining socio-technological transition theory with socio-ecological system approaches and political economy I argue that the most important leverage point to making this transition happen lies in a change of the mainstream economic paradigm. Its main concepts are blind when it comes to understanding human needs and nature's abilities to regenerate the resources that their satisfaction depends on, in particular when thinking about the long term.

Thus, their instrumental role in shaping not only economic goals and institutions but also individual mindsets, social roles, cultural narratives and societal paradigms needs to be put center stage when seeking to understand and analyze how and where to ignite interventions that promise to support the aspirations that the 2030 Agenda sets out for the world.

Short bio

Maja Göpel heads the Berlin Office of the Wuppertal Institute. Her research, engagement and publications focus on system transformations for sustainable development, new prosperity models and future justice with an emphasis on the role of paradigm shifts as strategic leverage points. Maja studied in Siegen, Fribourg, Seville, Hamburg, Kassel and Toronto to complete a PhD in political economy and a university diploma in media/communication. She has a long track record in international civil society work on sustainable development, trade, and climate change, lectures at 2 universities and enjoys working in transdisciplinary teams. She is a member of The Club of Rome and The Balaton Group and serves on several advisory boards as well as review committees. Her daughters are 4 and 1 and her book *The Great Mindshift: Why we Need a New Economic Paradigm for Sustainability Transitions* is due 2016 with Springer.