



MASTERARBEIT | MASTER'S THESIS

Titel | Title

The concept of inner sustainability and its role in sustainable
transformation

An analysis of actors in the DACH-region working in the niche “inner
sustainability”

verfasst von | submitted by

Clara Elisabeth Mehringer

angestrebter akademischer Grad | in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of

Master of Science (MSc)

Wien | Vienna, 2025

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt |
Degree programme code as it appears on
the student record sheet:

UA 066 855

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt | Degree
programme as it appears on the student
record sheet:

Masterstudium Geography: Global Change and
Sustainability

Betreut von | Supervisor:

Mag. Mag. Dr. Gudrun Haindlmaier

Abstract german

Der Fokus dieser Arbeit liegt auf der Analyse von Akteure, die sich auf Nischenebene in der DACH-Region mit innerer Nachhaltigkeit befassen, und wie die Wirkung innerer Nachhaltigkeit als bedeutenden Treiber für nachhaltige Entwicklung skalieren werden kann. Durch die Kombination einer qualitativen Clusteranalyse von 21 Akteuren mit drei zusätzlichen Interviews identifiziert die Studie drei unterschiedliche Akteurstypen, die sich durch ihren Grad an Systemorientierung unterscheiden: *individually-transformative actors*, *system-aware personal development actors*, and *systemically-transformative actors*. Das Mehrebenenmodell nach Geels dient dabei als theoretischer Rahmen, um besser zu verstehen, wie die auf Nischenebene tätigen Akteure innere Nachhaltigkeit skalieren können. Die Interviews geben einen tieferen Einblick in die Hindernisse und Chancen, die Akteure bei der Verankerung von innerer Nachhaltigkeit innerhalb der breiteren Gesellschaft haben.

Abstract english

This paper focuses on analysing actors who deal with inner sustainability at the niche level in the DACH region and how the impact of inner sustainability can be scaled as a significant driver of sustainable development. By combining a qualitative cluster analysis of 21 actors with three additional interviews, the study identifies three different types of actors that differ in their degree of system orientation: individually-transformative actors, system-aware personal development actors, and systemically-transformative actors. Geels' multi-level model serves as a theoretical framework to better understand how actors operating at the niche level can scale internal sustainability. The interviews provide deeper insight into the obstacles and opportunities actors face in anchoring internal sustainability within broader society.

Content

1	Introduction	1
2	Methods.....	3
2.1	Cluster Analysis	4
2.2	Qualitative Interviews	11
3	Theoretical background: The Multi-Level Perspective.....	13
3.1	Systemic change for sustainability	13
3.2	Pathways of transition	16
4	Geographical context.....	18
5	The role of inner sustainability.....	19
5.1	Connection between inner and outer sustainability.....	19
5.2	Defining inner sustainability	21
5.3	Inner Sustainability as a powerful Leverage point.....	23
5.4	Approaches to and frameworks for inner sustainability.....	25
5.4.1	Inner Development Goals.....	25
5.4.2	The Sustainability Mindset Principles.....	27
5.4.3	Future Skills	28
5.5	Scaling of inner Sustainability	30
6	Results.....	32
6.1	Cluster Analysis	32
6.1.1	Identification of categories.....	32
6.1.2	Overview and general observations	35
6.1.3	Individually-transformative.....	40
6.1.4	System-aware personal development	45
6.1.5	Systemically-transformative.....	51
6.2	Qualitative Interviews	56
6.2.1	Barriers	58
6.2.2	Opportunities.....	60
7	Discussion	64

7.1	Summary of the results.....	65
7.2	Reference to the MLP	66
7.3	Limitations of the study.....	71
8	Conclusion and Outlook.....	71
	References.....	73
9	Appendix.....	82
9.1	Guiding questions for Interviews	82
9.2	Interview Inner Green Deal.....	82
9.3	Interview Orientierungszeiten	93
9.4	Interview Pioneers of change	103

Table of Illustrations

Figure 1: Research design (own illustration). 3

Figure 2: The Multi-Level-Perspective (own illustration based on Geels 2002:1261). 14

Figure 3: The geographical context for the analysis (own illustration)..... 19

Figure 4: Leverage Points based on Donella Meadows 1999 (Abson et al. 2017:32). 24

Figure 5: The Inner Development Goals (IDG 2025). 26

Figure 6: The 12 Sustainability Mindset Principles (Rimanoczy 2021: 21). 28

Figure 7: Inner future skills (Stockinger and Buchebner 2024:20). 29

Figure 8: Spatial distribution and frequency of headquarters (own illustration)..... 36

Figure 9: Mode of operation of the analyzed actors (own illustration)..... 37

Figure 10: Spatial distribution of the three categories (own illustration)..... 39

1 Introduction

The widely accepted concept of sustainability emphasizes that future generations should not be deprived of their ability to meet their own needs. Despite this common understanding, our planet and its inhabitants continue to suffer from exploitation and degradation. Despite many efforts to promote sustainability, the world seems to be moving in the opposite direction. Why is this the case? The answer is that we as humans need to take a fundamentally different approach (Ives et al. 2020).

As James Gustave Speth, former UNDP Administrator stated: *“I used to think the top environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse, and climate change. I thought that with 30 years of good science we could address those problems. But I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed, and apathy ... and to deal with those we need a spiritual and cultural transformation – and we scientists don’t know how to do that.”* (Bovarnick and Legrand 2022).

The focus of this thesis is thus to examine critically whether the current understanding of sustainability is capable of driving the deep transformation it aims for. It argues for a broader, more holistic approach that addresses underlying human values and the dimension of personal development as a relevant driver for sustainability transformation. Even though the transformative potential of inner sustainability dimensions is increasingly acknowledged in sustainability science, there remains a gap in understanding how these inner qualities are operationalized by real-world actors and how they are contributing to a broader systemic change (Frank et al. 2024). Therefore this thesis explores how actors who engage with inner sustainability at a niche level in the DACH region (Germany, Austria, Switzerland) can scale its impact as a meaningful driver for sustainable development.

To address this, the research is structured in three sequential steps. First, a literature-based analysis investigates the role of inner sustainability in contributing to sustainability transitions which clarifies its conceptual underpinnings and relevance. Second and to show the implementation of

inner sustainability by real actors, an exploratory mapping identifies and categorizes actors within the German-speaking region who work with inner sustainability as a strategic lever for change. Third, an empirical investigation examines the perspectives of these actors focusing more on the barriers and opportunities they encounter in scaling their impact. By this three-step approach both conceptual clarity and empirical insight into the role of inner sustainability within sustainability transitions is secured, with particular focus on how niche-level efforts might influence regime or system-level transformation.

Localisation within geography

Within geography science, sustainability studies are a central research field as it focuses on understanding as well as managing – across spatial and temporal scales – the complex interactions between natural and human systems. Geographers examine how environmental conditions interact with social, cultural, and economic dynamics, and how these interrelations influence both local and global sustainability outcomes (Pereira and Zhao 2025, Scown 2020). Human geography, a central part of geography, examines the relationships between people and their environments. This discipline brings together diverse subfields that collectively deepen our understanding of how humans both influence and are influenced by their spatial and ecological environments (Gregory and Bloomsbury 2022, Ramirez and Lizarazo 2025, Brunn 2022).

Sustainability challenges have traditionally been addressed through analyses of spatial patterns, socio-economic structures, governance systems, and environmental impacts within the field of human geography. All of these approaches are rooted in a predominantly external, system-oriented discourse that treats climate change as a technical or policy issue. However, the limitations of this framework become increasingly evident as shown by various researchers (Wamsler et al. 2021, Ives et al. 2020, Bristow et al. 2024). Human geography provides a suitable framework for investigating the internal dimensions of sustainability. Since these internal dimensions influence how individuals and groups interact with the environment, they can be understood as components of the broader

relational processes that human geography seeks to investigate (Ives et al. 2023). As inner sustainability emphasizes the integrated relationship between internal, namely the personal values, worldviews or capabilities, and external, like systemic structures, ecological challenges or perspectives of sustainable transformation it can therefore be positioned within the field of human geography (Ives et al. 2020).

By this new lens sustainability challenges are not only framed as systemic, but also as deeply human problems, shaped by internal mental states. Inner sustainability can therefore be understood as a necessary dimension of human-environment interaction in this context, by which it enriches the geographical understanding of sustainability by addressing the psychological and cultural roots of unsustainable practices. By integrating this inner focus, geography as a research field can expand its analytical scope and contribute to the profound behavioral transformations required for sustainability transitions in a new and more effective way (Wamsler et al. 2021).

2 Methods

To answer the main research question, a combination of two different methods was used for this study. The research design is illustrated in Figure 1, where the green steps are in the cluster analysis, and the last step shows the qualitative interviews that build up on the cluster analysis.

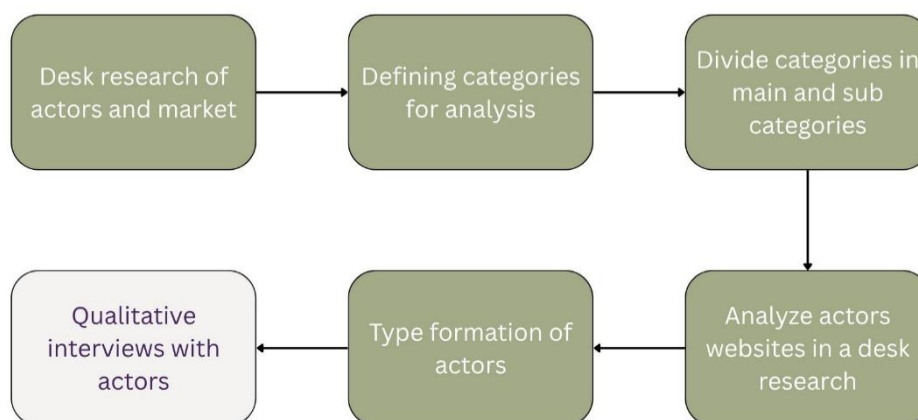


Figure 1: Research design (own illustration).

2.1 Cluster Analysis

To address the second research question – which actors in German-speaking countries are actively engaged in the implementation of inner sustainability as a lever for sustainable transformation – an exploratory qualitative cluster analysis was conducted. The objective of this method is to systematically map and structure the existing actor landscape in a research field that is currently underexplored. While the concept of inner sustainability has gained growing attention in academic discourse, the practical implementation by concrete actors has received little empirical attention to date. As such, this study responds to this research gap by identifying and categorizing organizations and initiatives working in this area. The aim of the cluster formation is not to develop ideal types, nor to statistically generalize findings, but rather to create analytically meaningful groupings of actors based on shared features. These categories provide an overview of the diversity, orientations, and thematic field within inner sustainability, thereby contributing to a better understanding of the emerging niche. For the purpose of this study, the method of typology-oriented qualitative content analysis based on the framework developed by Kuckartz and Rädiker (2023) was adapted and enhanced by suggestions from the ideal type formation by Stapley et al. (2021).

Kuckartz and Rädiker (2023) suggest starting the analytical process with an initiating text work, in which texts are read as a first step, and relevant passages are marked for the coding process, which is then used as a starting point. Within this research the focus lies not on the analysis of interviews or narrative texts, but rather on actors profiles identified through systematic desktop research, therefor this step was modified, according to the first step presented by Stapley et al. (2021), namely getting familiar with the database.

Instead of analyzing a predefined text, the first step (*Desk research of actors and market*, see Figure 1) consisted of defining a set of search terms related to the concept of inner sustainability. These keywords were then used to systematically search the web for organizations and individuals based in the DACH region who are active in this field. The analysis and screening were

done between May and June 2025. The following seven German-language search terms were selected to reflect the conceptual framing of inner sustainability and its application in practice:

- Achtsamkeit
- Nachhaltigkeit
- Innere Nachhaltigkeit
- Persönlichkeitsentwicklung
- Inner Development Goals
- Innere Dimension von Nachhaltigkeit
- Zukunftskompetenz

To narrow the scope of the research and maintain relevance to the guiding research question, a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria was applied. Considered were organizations and individuals that address inner sustainability in relation to (young) adults as a target group. Excluded were actors whose focus lies exclusively on business development, performance enhancement, discipline- or leadership-centered coaching, or those whose primary target group is children. In line with the theoretical lens of the MLP, only those actors were included whose approach indicate a potential to transcend the niche of “personal development for individual wellbeing” and who instead position inner sustainability as a strategic contribution to broader societal transformation. This includes an explicit or implicit intention in their vision or mission to challenge or reshape dominant regime structures.

Based on these criteria, relevant actors currently active in promoting inner sustainability were identified and initially reviewed. This preliminary screening served to gain an overview of the field and to derive thematic and structural patterns, which then informed the development of analytical categories for the subsequent typology-building process. Following this initial identification and screening of relevant actors in an excel sheet, the next step was to define a set of analytical factors to guide the categorization and comparison process. These factors serve as the basis for structuring the field and developing meaningful clusters that reflect the different

orientations, practices, and impact logics of the actors involved in inner sustainability. The following section outlines and explains each of these factors in detail.

In a second step (*Defining categories for analysis*), a set of analytical categories was developed to enable a systematic and comparable description of the selected actors. The process was guided by a combination of theoretical considerations and an initial review of the actors' websites. The categories functioned as a holistic framework for collecting, structuring, and coding data during the desk research phase. They do not represent types in themselves but rather build the dimensions along which variation among actors can be observed and compared. This approach ensures that the actor analysis is systematic and interpretive, providing a structured and still flexible basis for understanding the emerging field of inner sustainability practice.

In a third step (*Divide categories in main and sub categories*), after reviewing the categories, the initially broad and partly overlapping list of dimensions was reorganized into main categories, each encompassing several clearly defined subcategories. This structure allows for a coherent and systematic analysis while preserving the complexity and diversity of the field.

The resulting three main categories are as follows: (1) *Organizational Profile* – captures the organizational and structural features of the actors, including legal form, financing models and the geographical scope; (2) *Content* – addresses the thematic and strategic orientation and purpose of the actor's work, including their core topics, guiding vision, and conceptualization of inner sustainability and (3) *Implementation* – describes how the actor operates in practice, including methods, formats, communication strategies, and the characteristics of the target groups they address.

This analytical framework provides the foundation for the subsequent comparison and clustering of actors. This approach makes an identification of both commonalities and differences possible, thereby supporting the development of a typology that captures the diversity of inner sustainability

practices in the DACH region. The definitions of the subcategories are presented below.

Organizational Profile

Legal Form

This subcategory captures the legal status under which the actor operates. The classification is based on publicly available information provided on the actors' websites, such as entries in the imprint section or descriptions of the organization. No predefined categories were applied in advance; rather, legal forms were recorded as stated on the websites.

The purpose of this category is not to analyze the legal structures in detail, but to provide basic contextual information about the organizational form (e.g., non-profit association, GmbH, foundation, individual actor, or public institution). This information helps to situate the actors within a broader context.

Size

This subcategory refers to the approximate number of people actively working within or for the organization, either as employees, core team members, or regular collaborators (excluding temporary volunteers or large follower communities). Based on publicly available information, actors were assigned to one of the following groups: 1 person – solo entrepreneurs or individual practitioners; (2) 2 to 10 people – small teams or informal collectives; (3) 11 to 50 people – mid-sized organizations with formalized roles; (4) More than 50 people – large organizations with complex structures. This is a pre-structured category based on number ranges. Where numbers were not explicitly mentioned, the classification was inferred from information such as team pages, mentions of staff size, or organizational descriptions. Cases without sufficient information were marked as *Not applicable*.

Financing

The financing model of an actor offers important insights into the economic foundation, strategic orientation, and potential dependency structures of their work. It can also reflect whether the initiative is positioned more toward

social impact, commercial viability, or a hybrid purpose. This category captures the primary modes of financing used to support the actor's activities. The coding differentiates between the following types (1) *Commercial model*: services or products are sold at market prices; (2) *Donation-based model*: activities are funded through voluntary contributions and (3) *Foundation or grant-based model*: the initiative is funded through external grants, sponsorships, or institutional partners.

Geographical focus of impact

The geographical focus of an actor's work offers important insights into the spatial reach, inclusivity, and accessibility of their activities. While some actors operate locally or nationally, others aim to reach audiences across borders. Three distinctions are made: (1) regional: primarily focused on a specific region or community; (2) National: operating across a whole country and (3) International: Accessible independently of borders in the whole DACH-Region (or beyond).

Content

Vision

The vision of an actor expresses their overarching purpose, long-term orientation, and often their understanding of the societal or cultural transformation they wish to contribute to. In the context of inner sustainability, vision statements provide insight into whether actors aim merely at individual development or whether they embed personal change in broader system transformation goals. This category is therefore central to understanding the depth and scope of the actor's change logic. This category captures the explicitly stated or implicitly communicated vision of the actor, understood as their overarching goal, purpose, or imagined future communicated on the websites

Understanding of inner sustainability

This category captures how actors explicitly define, name, or frame the concept of (inner) sustainability, or how they implicitly express related understandings through the values and goals they communicate. Attention was paid to whether the understanding is explicit (e.g. through definitions,

frameworks, IDG references), systemic (e.g. linking inner and outer sustainability, transformation discourse), or individualistic/introspective (e.g. self-care, personal growth, without societal linkage). This is a freely coded category, based on interpretative analysis.

Relation to (inner) sustainability

Since “inner sustainability” is a relatively new and evolving concept, actors may understand and apply it in different depths, framings, or systemic connections. Some may explicitly refer to inner transformation in connection with ecological or social change, while others integrate the idea implicitly through terms like mindfulness, resilience, or self-awareness. Understanding how actors define or interpret inner sustainability provides critical insight into the conceptual maturity, framing strategies, and the degree of innovation they bring to the field. Thus, the actors were categorized into two groups, either having (1) a *direct relation* to inner sustainability or (2) *indirectly* contributing to it.

Implementation

Target Group(s)

This subcategory captures how each actor defines and addresses their intended audience. It includes objective characteristics such as demographics, as well as thematic or psychological profiles. The aim is to understand who the offers are designed for and which target groups are seen as relevant for the actor’s transformation goals.

Where possible, the information was taken directly from how the actor self-describes their target group on their website. If no explicit definition was provided, a summary was generated based on the language, tone, and framing used in course descriptions, testimonials, and visual communication. In this sense, the category is qualitative and interpretative.

This subcategory is open-ended and allows for nuanced characterization across a spectrum of actor types, making it particularly useful for understanding whom inner sustainability is currently being marketed to and how inclusive or exclusive the field is in terms of reach.

Offered Transformation

The promised transformation expresses what kind of change an actor claims to make possible for their target group. This includes the desired inner state or life situation participants are meant to reach through the offering. Unlike a general vision or topic list, this category focuses on the concrete transformation outcome communicated to the end user, which reveals how the actor understands inner change and which aspects of inner development they prioritize.

Offers

The types of offers provided by an actor give concrete insight into how they operationalize their vision and translate abstract goals into practical interventions. The form and structure of the offers reflect both the actor's target group and their methodological preferences. Offers are also relevant for understanding accessibility, scalability, and didactic orientation of inner sustainability work. This category captures the formats and delivery modes used by the actor to engage their audience. A distinction was made between Courses Online, Courses Offline, Retreats/Seminars Online, Retreats/Seminars Offline, Journals, Books, etc., Speaking Events Online, Speaking Events Offline and Train the Trainer Courses.

Methodology

While offer formats describe the what, the methodology focuses on the how: it reveals the underlying approaches, tools, and theories of change through which actors seek to bring about transformation. By analyzing the methods used, one can better understand the pedagogical, psychological, or philosophical assumptions behind an actor's practice. This is especially relevant in the field of inner sustainability, where methods range from cognitive tools to experiential body-based or spiritual approaches. This category openly captures the concrete methods, tools, and approaches employed by the actor to support their target group

Communication Channels

The communication channels used by an actor provide insight into their outreach strategy, audience engagement, and level of (digital) presence. The visibility and accessibility of offers depend strongly on how and where

communication takes place. This category refers to the primary platforms and tools through which the actor communicates with their audience and markets their offerings. Both informational and interactive channels were considered. This is a pre-structured category with predefined communication types: (1) Website, (2) social media, (3) Newsletter and (4) Podcast.

In a fourth step, as presented in the research design (*Analyze actors websites in a desk research*), the categories were filled for each actor. Only actors' websites were considered; other sources, such as social media profiles, course programs and press releases, were not examined as this would exceed the scope of this work.

This led to the fifth and final step in the cluster analysis (*type formation of actors*), as three different types were defined, in which the actors could be classified. The insights and the development of the three types are presented in the section "Results".

2.2 Qualitative Interviews

To answer the third research question, "What barriers and opportunities do these actors see to scale the impact of inner sustainability?", a qualitative, empirical approach was chosen. This involved conducting semi-structured interviews with some of the analyzed actors. The initial aim was to interview one representative from each of the three pre-defined categories. The selection criteria were designed to ensure heterogeneity, considering factors such as legal form, degree of institutionalization, and the methods and services provided, leading to the first election of Homodea, Alexandra Müller and Pioneers of Change. However, the representatives from the first two categories were unable to participate due to time constraints. To address this, other actors were contacted and the option of a written interview with pre-defined questions was offered. Unfortunately, the response rate was very low, and no responses were received from the first category.

Consequently, the decision was made to contact the remaining to get more insights from more interviews. This led to successful interviews with

representatives from Pioneers of Change, Orientierungszeiten and Inner Green Deal. Thus, two interviews were conducted with actors from the third category and one interview with an actor from the second category, see Table 1. This meant that the first category was not represented in the interviews which reduces the validity and reliability of the results. Furthermore, it was not possible to interview any single-person enterprises due to the same time constraints.

Structured, semi-guided expert interviews were used as the data collection instrument. The interview guide and transcripts can be found in the appendix. All interviews were conducted online via MS Teams. The interview guide served as the basis for the questions, but it was adapted and supplemented during the conversations to allow for a more natural conversational flow.

The interviews were transcribed using a modified version of the transcription procedure by Fuß and Karbach (2019). The initial transcription was generated with the transcription AI in MS-Teams. To make the transcripts more readable and facilitate later analysis, a smoothing method (journalistic transcription) was chosen. This approach involved rephrasing the original expressions into understandable German sentences.

The evaluation of the interview data was based on the principles of qualitative content analysis as outlined by Mayring (2016). An inductive category development was performed to tag the transcribed interviews and systematically answer the research questions. The data was worked through, and content categories were formed, guided by the research questions to ensure that the content and statements from the interviews could be assigned to the appropriate questions. The interviews were then sorted, and the relevant text passages were assigned to the categories using color markers. This process aligns with Kuckartz's (2018:73) view of category formation as an active construction process based on the available material. After this initial categorization, the interviews were further structured by refining the thematic areas and assigning more specific keywords. With this, the primary goal of this analysis to identify the barriers and opportunities that actors see in scaling inner sustainability, was met.

	Name	Based in	Legal Form	system orientation
				Type 2
	Orientierungszeiten	Kassel	gGmbH (non-profit)	System-aware personal development
				Type 3
	Inner Green Deal	Cologne	gGmbH (non-profit)	Systemically-transformative
	Pioneers of change	St. Pölten	non-profit organization (Verein)	Systemically-transformative

Table 1: Overview of Interviewpartners

3 Theoretical background: The Multi-Level Perspective

The Multi-Level Perspective (MLP) is a theoretical framework used to study transitions by conceptualizing transitions as non-linear processes that result from the interplay of multiple developments across three levels. The MLP explains how societal transformation occur and how they are shaped. The model emphasizes that change can happen at any level and is driven by the interactions between these levels, not in a strict top-down or bottom-up order (Geels and Schot 2007, Geels and Schot 2010, Bauknecht et al. 2015). Transformations occur through interactions between niche innovations, existing regimes, and wider landscape factors. Niches act as safe environments where radical innovations can grow and gain strength. Shifts in the broader landscape, like economic changes or societal trends, can weaken established regimes, creating chances for these innovations to spread and challenge the current system. Over time, this holds the possibility of adoption and embedding of new arrangements that support sustainability transitions (Geels 2019).

3.1 Systemic change for sustainability

The MLP provides a suitable framework to better understand how systemic changes toward sustainable futures unfold through interactions among innovations, established systems and broader societal trends within sustainability and societal transformation research. In this context, sustainability transitions involve profound changes in socio-technical or socio-economic systems such as energy, transport, food and water, which

are highly relevant in people's everyday lives, in institutions, for infrastructure and for cultural practices. Given that gradual improvements within an existing system are usually not enough for addressing complex challenges like climate change, biodiversity loss and resource scarcity has been recognized within sustainability and societal transformation research. Instead, going with the MLP-logic broad transitions require radical, systemic changes that encompass new technologies, practices, policies and/or social norms. This theoretical framework contributes to this understanding by conceptualizing transitions as multi-dimensional and multi-level processes (Geels 2002, Geels and Kemp 2012). Figure 2 shows the three levels of this approach and how they influence each other.

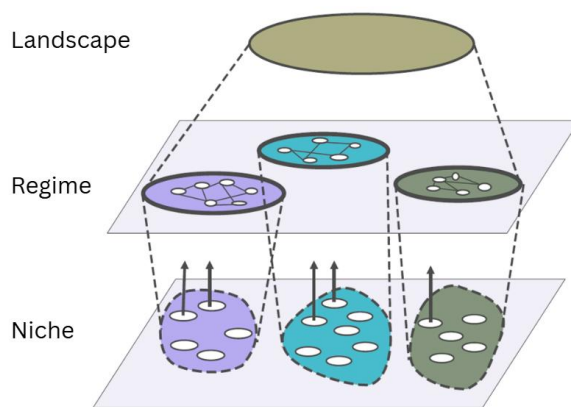


Figure 2: The Multi-Level-Perspective (own illustration based on Geels 2002:1261).

Innovations mostly come up within niches, as this is a frame where they are shielded from the pressures of established markets and are able to evolve without immediate competition. Key processes take place within these protected spaces that are essential for the innovation to scale. Niche actors articulate expectations and build social networks that help mobilize support and resources for innovation. Learning processes play a crucial role at the same time, as ideas are tested and refined in this controlled environments and safe spaces, which helps to improve their feasibility. Niches thus provide the necessary conditions for innovations and serve as experimental grounds for new innovations to develop outside the influence of the mainstream (Geels and Kemp 2012). If such a innovation proves viable, it can progress and attract attention, which leads to the opportunity to

challenge the status quo (Geels and Schot 2010). To a certain extent, the niche innovations can develop in isolation and protected from the regime, as they are not exposed to the selection pressure of the regime and do not have to orient themselves to the regime structures. Geels (2002) also emphasizes the importance of niches, as they offer space for learning processes and for building a network that supports the innovation. In contrast to the entrenched structures of the regime and the landscape, niches are also characterized by a high degree of flexibility and a high potential for change. Radical innovations that emerge in these niches not only have the potential to continue existing structures in the regime, but also to change them (Bauknecht et al. 2015).

Once innovations gain sufficient traction within niches, they encounter the challenge of competing with regimes. These regimes are characterised by a high degree of stability, which is often strengthened by lock-in mechanisms such as existing consumer habits, regulatory structures and dominant technological developments. In order for innovations to scale up from the niche to the regime level, they must either be aligned with these firmly established systems or be capable of disrupting them. A detailed understanding of regime structures can help identify potential integration pathways and leverage points for transformation (Geels and Kemp 2012, Geels and Schot 2010).

The individual regimes are embedded in a socio-technological landscape that consists of a diverse number of profound structural trends. These trends include, for example, economic growth, emigration, broad political coalitions, cultural and normative values or environmental problems. These are even more difficult to influence than the regime: As a rule, these trends lie outside the direct influence of the regime or the niches (Geels 2002). Geels (2005) distinguishes between two types of landscape change. The first refers to slow changes such as cultural and demographic change or changes in political ideology. However, rapid changes or shocks can also occur at the landscape level, such as war or a change in the price of oil. On the one hand, developments in the landscape can exert pressure for change on the prevailing regimes; on the other hand, the landscape might also contribute to the stability of the regime (Bauknecht et al. 2015). Broader

contextual factors, including cultural values, political dynamics, and economic conditions, are summarized on the landscape level. This exogenous level captures broader socio-technical trends and societal values, encompassing contextual factors that can influence both niches and regimes, such as environmental concerns or global economic developments. Changes on the landscape level and of the external influences that impact a system can create windows of opportunity or act as barriers to the scaling of innovations. For example, shifts in public opinion toward sustainability or changes in governmental policies can create favorable conditions for niche innovations to gain traction and be integrated into the mainstream (Geels and Kemp 2012; Smith et al. 2010; Geels and Schot 2010).

The MLP assumes that social change can be explained as the result of the interactions between the processes of the three levels: First, niche innovations build internal momentum through learning processes, improve their performance and get support from relevant actors. In addition, the landscape level generates pressure for change on the regime. As a result, the destabilization of the system creates a so-called window of opportunity which the niche innovation can use to settle and gain reach (Geels and Schot 2007).

3.2 Pathways of transition

A transition pathway is an analytical construct that characterizes the temporal and dynamic patterns through which transitions occur. It explains the processes by which niches interact with existing regimes and broader landscape conditions to create systemic change. Transition pathways describe variations in the timing and nature of interactions at multiple levels, including the development and scaling of niche innovations, regime stability or destabilization, and landscape pressures that facilitate or hinder transitions. By systematically describe different types of pathways they can be better understood and analyzed.

Geels and Kemp (2012) differentiate between four transition pathways: *Transformation pathway (1)*: Occurs when the landscape puts pressure on regime and niche, but niche-innovations are not yet sufficiently developed.

Regime actors respond by gradually modifying existing development paths and innovations within the regime, leading to step-by-step changes rather than radical replacement. *De-alignment and re-alignment pathway (2)*: Great landscape pressures cause serious internal problems in the regime, leading to its disintegration (de-alignment of regime elements). This leads to the opportunity for multiple competing niche innovations to coexist, resulting in a period of uncertainty. *Technological substitution pathway (3)*: Happens when strong landscape pressure overlaps with well-developed niche innovations. These innovations break through and then replace the existing regime, with that making a regime shift possible. *Reconfiguration pathway (4)*: Niche innovations are introduced into the existing system to address local issues and are spread over time, which then leads to gradual but systemic change.

Researchers are enabled to better understand and analyze the link between the development of niche innovations and broader system-level changes, as it give a frame for these complex, multi-dimensional transformations and how they unfold in society (Bauknecht et al. 2015).

Within the MLP framework, actors play a crucial role. While the main focus of the MLP lies on the interactions between structural levels it acknowledges the role individual and collective actors have as essential drivers for initiating, nurturing, and scaling innovations. These actors are responsible for organizing resources, developing networks and strategically navigating opportunities to promote niche innovations that have the potential to challenge or transform existing regimes (Bauknecht et al. 2015). Accordingly, this concept serves as a valuable framework for analyzing how actors implementing inner sustainability at a niche level in the DACH region can scale their impact as a lever for sustainable development. Given that inner sustainability remains a relatively new and specialized approach within the broader sustainability discourse, the MLP provides a structured way to assess how this niche concept interacts with established systems and what conditions enable or hinder its wider adoption. Thus, actors – when able to recognize windows of opportunities created by landscape pressures and regime destabilization – function as key agents in shaping transition pathways within the structural constraints and possibilities (Bauknecht et al.

2015). Similarly, the WBGU (2011) emphasizes the role actors play in transformation processes. Pioneers initially operate as niche actors who test and promote new visions and innovations that serve as guiding principles for societal change. Although starting in niches, they can increasingly exert influence and decisively drive a transformation process forward.

The transition toward sustainability has stagnated, and academic research has failed to catalyze meaningful transformation thus far. As Parodi and Tamm (2018) argue, one key reason for this is a significant blind spot within sustainability science: the lack of attention to the human dimension of change. The niche innovation “Personal sustainability” aims at addressing this issue by highlighting a significant and often overlooked aspect of sustainable development. Conventional approaches, shaped by academic, economic, and political institutions, tend to focus on external systems, collective action, and global processes.

4 Geographical context

This study focuses on the German-speaking DACH region, which comprises Germany (D), Austria (A), and Switzerland (CH). Due to their close historical, cultural, economic, and political ties as well as their shared language, the term “DACH” is broadly used to describe these three countries. This regional framing is frequently employed in academic and practical studies, particularly in fields related to economics, sustainability, and education, as it allows for comparative analysis within a linguistically and culturally coherent area. The region is illustrated in Figure 3.

Looking at Europe, the DACH countries are situated at the heart of the continent and collectively form a significant economic stronghold that has huge global influence (Stöckl et al. 2024). The DACH region was selected for this study not only due to its shared language and cultural proximity but also for practical reasons: most of the actors examined communicate in German. This makes it easier to compare content and analyze online presence.

All three countries are united in their high level of political commitment to climate goals: Germany has set a target to reach climate neutrality by 2045

(BMUV 2021), Austria by 2040 (Bundesministerium für Klimaschutz, Umwelt, Energie, Mobilität, Innovation und Technologie 2022), and Switzerland by 2050 (Bundesamt für Umwelt 2023), underscoring the relevance of exploring innovative approaches to sustainability within the DACH region (Ausfelder & Kundler 2023).

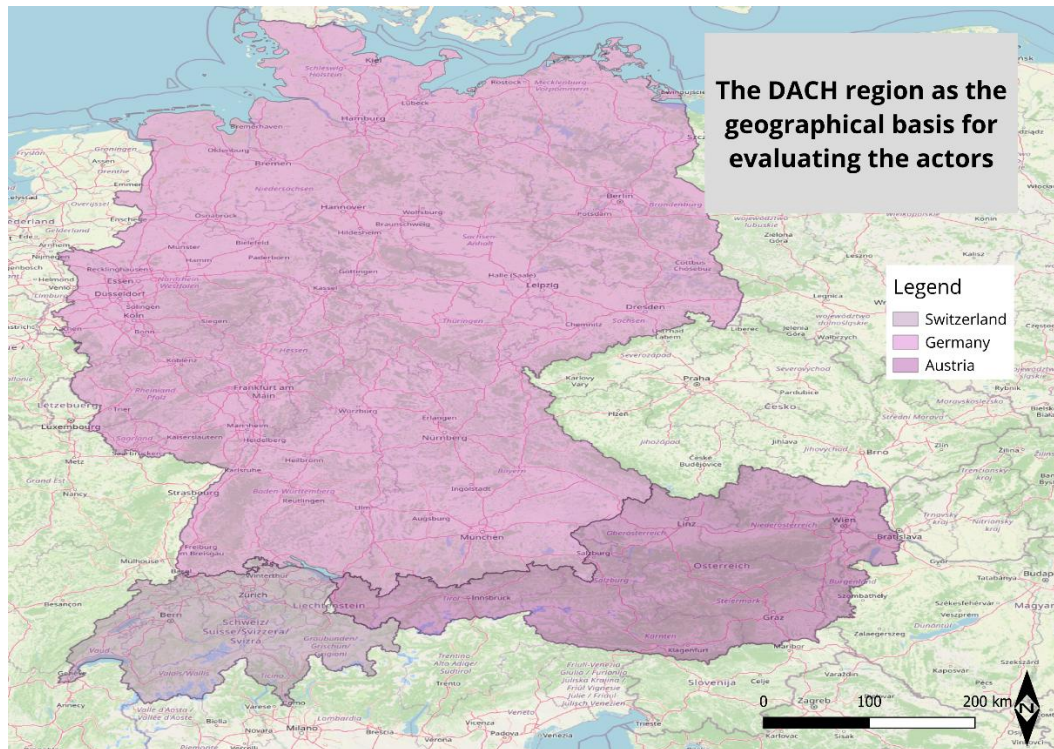


Figure 3: The geographical context for the analysis (own illustration).

5 The role of inner sustainability

This chapter aims to provide an overview of the status quo in the scientific research of inner sustainability and therefore aims to answer the first research question, what role inner sustainability plays in contributing to sustainable development. Before addressing the actors and strategies involved in this process later, it is essential to understand the significance of inner sustainability itself and why it may serve as a lever for sustainable transformation.

5.1 Connection between inner and outer sustainability

Traditional sustainability encompasses the three dimensions ecology, economy, and social aspects. Topics such as reducing CO₂ emissions,

preserving biodiversity, promoting sustainable economic systems, and combating inequality are now widely discussed and set out as goals in the SDGs. And all of these are crucial for the transition to a sustainable world (e.g. Wasieleski and Weber 2020, Sterner et al. 2019, Rockström et al. 2015, Kopfmüller 2007, United Nations 2023).

Despite the considerable focus on sustainability issues in both science and politics, humanity continues to an unsustainable development. This is, at least in part, linked to the failure of sustainability science to adequately address the fundamental causes of unsustainability (Abson et al. 2017).

The complexity of transformation processes is often oversimplified by technical solutions and behavior-oriented approaches, resulting in a lack of holistic view (O'Brien 2018). Outer sustainability targets, as they are presented in the Earth4All Report (Dixson-Decleve et al. 2022) or the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations (UN 2015), are – while being essential for guiding systemic change – insufficient on their own because they do not automatically enhance the behavioral, cultural and psychological shifts that are necessary for a long-term change. There is more and more research and thus evidence that shows that deep-rooted beliefs, worldviews and emotional capacities profoundly influence how individuals and society behave and at without addressing these inner dimensions, and that external measures risk superficial compliance or unintended resistance. Inner sustainability is seen critical for fostering intrinsic motivation and a shared sense of purpose that sustains long-term engagement with sustainability goals such as the SDGs. Taking inner life seriously, which means to include how people construct meaning, relate to others and cultivate resilience, is therefore essential for enabling the depth of transformation required to meet today's complex challenges humanity and earth are facing (Ives et al. 2020, Abson et al. 2017).

The IPCC report, for example, included inner transitions for sustainability, marking a significant shift toward acknowledging the relevance of those. Scholars and practitioners began to understand that implementing the psychological dimension to sustainability discussion is crucial for societal well-being and ecological resilience. This evolving understanding

underscores that addressing only external systems is insufficient; instead, there has been a growing movement toward integrating inner capacities within sustainability science and systems transformation (IPCC 2022:1736), Bristow et al. 2024). Often neglecting the broader spectrum of human-nature relationships, prevailing policy approaches have predominantly focused on a limited set of instrumental values as the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) highlights additionally. In response, the report calls for public policies that reflect the diversity of values and promote relational modes of (re)connection to nature, others and oneself as a form of inner transformation at the institutional level with potential for significant ecological impact (IPBES 2022). Another example of how the concept of inner sustainability is increasingly acknowledged by formal and institutional actors, the Earth for All Deep Dive paper serves as a compelling reference point. Bristow et al. (2024) argue that outer targets, as outlined in the Report “Earth for All: A Survival Guide for Humanity”, are insufficient on their own to bring about meaningful transformation, as they overlook the inner dimensions that fundamentally underpin systemic change. While far-reaching policy measures and material interventions are undoubtedly necessary, the authors stress that such efforts will fall short without simultaneously addressing the psychological, social and cultural conditions that shape human behavior.

So, only by nurturing inner conditions and at the same time achieving outer targets can systemic change be genuinely resilient, authentic and enduring (Bristow et al. 2024, Stockinger and Buchebner 2024). Wamsler (2018) as well emphasizes that relying solely on outer sustainability targets such as technological innovations, policy measures or ecological metrics is insufficient for achieving a true and holistic sustainability transformation. Being one of the leading scientists in this new research field she argues that addressing complex systemic challenges like climate change requires a broader cultural shift that includes inner transformation.

5.2 Defining inner sustainability

Inner transformation is the overarching term that refers to the process of unfolding human potential, working towards a better, more sustainable life

on an individual, collective and systemic level. As this concept includes the "inner dimensions" of humans individual and collective like mindsets, values, beliefs, worldviews, and the associated cognitive, emotional, and relational skills and capacities, it refers to a deep shift in perspective, emphasizing the interdependence and interconnectedness between oneself, others, and the world humans share (Leichenko and O'Brien 2020, Wamsler et al. 2021, Artmann 2023, Ives et al. 2023).

The recognition within sustainability and psychological science and related disciplines that inner dimensions of humans are influencing external environmental and social challenges in a fundamental way lead the development of the concept of inner sustainability. Initially emerging from the niche of personal development and inner transition, in recent years it has been recognized and gained increased attention as an essential component for effective and sustainable systemic change. This history reflects a shift away from viewing sustainability exclusively through external policy measures and technological solutions towards an understanding of the crucial role of internal characteristics in order to secure a real transformation in and of the world. The field has expanded through a process of systematization and integration of diverse practices and frameworks, and this progress is marked by a shift from fractured individual approaches to a more holistic understanding that inner transformation is not only a requirement but also a driver for external sustainability changes (Ives et al. 2023). This development has also been influenced by interdisciplinary research showing that mindfulness and inner practices can promote environmentally conscious behavior, deepen the spiritual and emotional connection between ecology and nature, and lead to the changes that are required for sustainability (Wamsler 2018).

Literature does not present a standard definition for inner sustainability. Terms such as "inner sustainability," "personal sustainability," "inner transformation" or "inner transition" and thus they are used interchangeably. The literature highlights that it is a multifaceted concept including various inner dimensions ranging from consciousness, values, beliefs and worldviews to human-nature connectedness. According to current research all of these elements are interconnected and collectively influence personal

and societal change towards sustainability (Bristow et al. 2024, Wamsler 2019). Woiwode et al. (2021), furthermore state that inner sustainability relates to exploring and transforming these inner aspects to support systemic change, and although a precise, standardized definition is lacking, it is generally understood as fostering inner development that aligns with sustainable futures. In the context of this study and based on the scientific research of the relevant scientists, inner sustainability refers to the cultivation of inner qualities and thus encompasses psychological, emotional, and sometimes spiritual dimensions that shape how people perceive, relate to, and act within the world (based on Wamsler 2018, Bristow et al. 2024, Parodi et al. 2023, Ives et al. 2020).

5.3 Inner Sustainability as a powerful Leverage point

In her 1999 essay “Leverage Points,” Donella Meadows highlighted that the most significant potential for sustainable development is found in a paradigm shift, as well as a rethinking and mindset change among individuals and society. She stresses that in order to attain genuine sustainability, it is necessary to change not only policies and technologies but also the fundamental mindset and worldview of individuals. In her view, being aware of the limitations of existing paradigms to bring about fundamental change is required and a necessary foundation. Meadows advocates focusing on more relevant leverage points – such as changing mindsets, promoting humility and encouraging systemic thinking in individuals and societies – to improve global sustainability, as they hold more power for change than lower leverage points. She points out that it is possible to bring about comprehensive systemic change with little effort by changing paradigms rather than adjusting physical or political variables. Furthermore, she points out that this type of change often requires deep humility, a willingness to abandon long-held beliefs, and an acceptance of complexity rather than seeking simple answers (Meadows 1999). Abson et al. (2017) put the 12 leverage points into 4 groups, as presented in Figure 4.

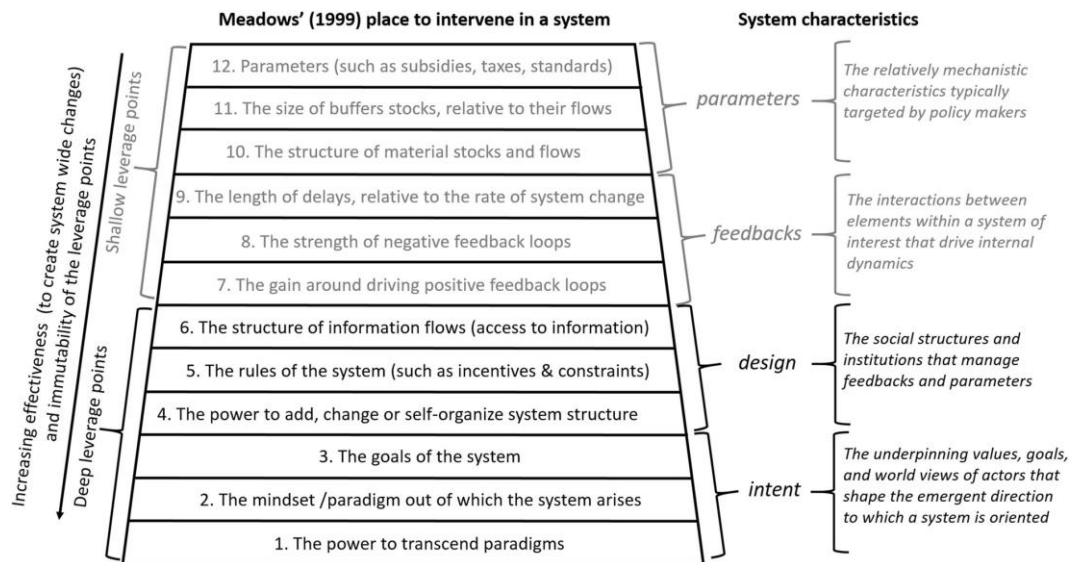


Figure 4: Leverage Points based on Donella Meadows 1999 (Abson et al. 2017:32).

Parameters thereby refer to tangible and adjustable elements within a system, such as taxes, incentives, standards, or physical quantities like stock sizes and flow rates. They tend to represent the shallowest level of change, even though they are often targeted in policy interventions. *Feedbacks* describe the internal interactions between system components that either stabilize or amplify system behavior and influence how a system responds to changes. It also shows whether a system tends to develop toward resilience or transformation. Including rules, power relations, information flows, and its capacity for self-organization, *Design* relates to the deeper structure of the system. Changes at this level can significantly shift how a system operates in general. The underlying values, norms, and worldviews embedded in the system are framed within the *Intent*, as here e system's emergent orientation is reflected and the implicit direction is showed that is shaped by multiple, and sometimes conflicting, goals and behaviors (Abson et al. 2017).

Based on the findings of Donella Meadows, Parodi et al. (2023) argue that the goal of a real transformation is only possible to be reached with a deep engagement with human's inner world and by addressing leverage points that are located at the level of *Design* and *Intent*. With this background, a truly holistic sustainable world cannot emerge without awareness and the necessary personal development of humans. The authors explore the

concept of personal sustainability as an integrated approach that addresses human inner dimensions to foster deeper consciousness and connectedness which are essential for sustainable development. Bringing a new aspect of sustainable transformation into the discussion of sustainability is the goal here, as human beings are conscious and responsible agents whose inner world significantly influence behaviors and actions related to sustainability.

So, parallel to and based on Donella Meadows paper from 1999, the current literature recognizes inner dimensions as deep leverage points for transformative change, but for personal sustainability to reach its full potential, it must become more inter- and transdisciplinary and be embedded into common practice (e.g. Parodi et al 2023, Wamsler 2018, Ritz and Rimanoczy 2018).

5.4 Approaches to and frameworks for inner sustainability

The aim of this subchapter is to illustrate the multidimensional nature of inner sustainability by presenting a selection of frameworks that offer different perspectives on how this concept can be understood and analyzed. Rather than providing a comprehensive overview, it focuses on offering an impression of the range of approaches presented in the relevant literature, having a special focus on frameworks that provide a systematic educational approach to inner sustainability. By exploring these frameworks, the chapter seeks to highlight the topic-wise diversity inner sustainability and the ways in which scholars have attempted to conceptualize and structure the broad topic of inner sustainability.

5.4.1 Inner Development Goals

The Inner Development Goals (IDGs) is a framework developed by a non-profit, open-source initiative from Stockholm that aims to narrow the gap between personal growth and global sustainability transformation. Recognizing that inner development is crucial for achieving sustainable change, and as an answer and reaction to the slow progress of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) they were created. The IDG framework is rooted in interdisciplinary research and identifies five dimensions with 23 specific skills and qualities of human inner growth and

development. The five dimensions are (1) *Being* (self-awareness and inner connection) including Inner Compass, Integrity and Authenticity, Openness and Learning Mindset, Self-awareness and Presence; (2) *Thinking* (cognitive skills) including Critical Thinking, Complexity Awareness, Perspective Skills, Sense Making and Long-term Orientation and Visioning; (3) *Relating* (social and emotional intelligence) including Appreciation, Connectedness, Humility and Empathy and Compassion; (4) *Collaborating* (cooperation and teamwork) including Communication Skills, Co-creation Skills, Inclusive Mindset and Intercultural Competence, Trust and Mobilization Skills and (5) *Acting* (engaged and responsible action) including Courage, Creativity, Optimism and Perseverance. Each of these areas is designed to enhance both personal and collective capabilities, enabling sustainable solutions and long-term decision-making for a better future (IDG 2025), see also Figure 5.

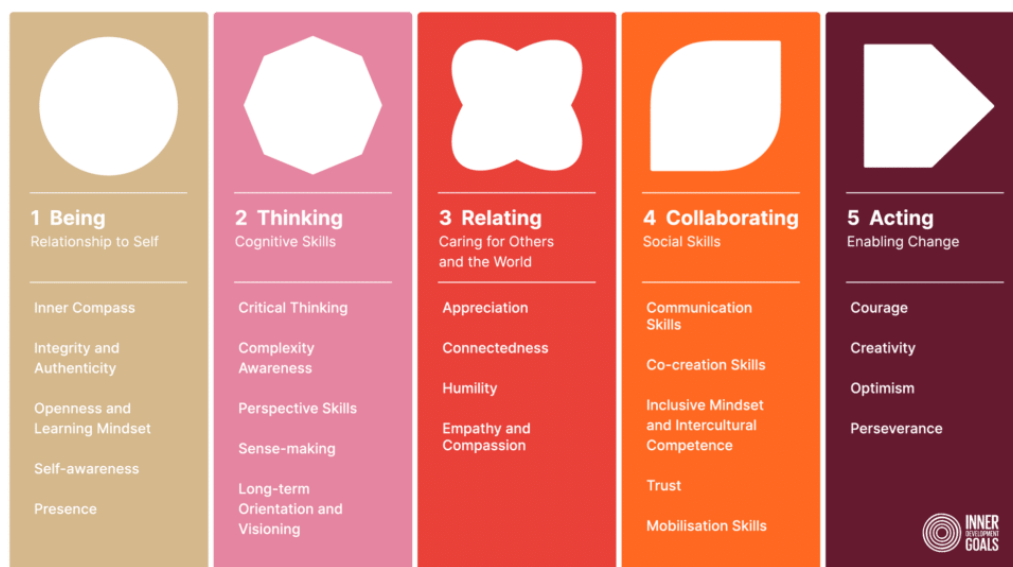


Figure 5: The Inner Development Goals (IDG 2025).

Initiated in 2020, the IDG initiative emerged from a partnership among several organizations, including the Ekskåret Foundation, the non-profit platform 29k, and the strategy agency The New Division. Their shared objective was to translate the multifaceted domain of inner development into an accessible and communicable framework.

The development of the IDGs unfolded in three interrelated phases and is still in a development process. In the initial survey phase which took place in March 2021, a comprehensive international survey was conducted to identify the inner skills, qualities, and abilities which are considered vital for achieving the SDGs by researchers, experts and broad society. The second phase focused on the development of a toolkit, involving more than 3000 contributors from academia, education, policy, and practice, leading to a collaboration process that resulted in the development of a scientifically sound, freely accessible toolkit designed to support individuals, teams, and organizations in developing these skills. The still ongoing third phase is the building of a community and the engagement from stakeholders. It encompasses a growing global network of researchers, practitioners and organizations dedicated to further refining, applying and contextualizing the framework in a variety of cultural and organizational contexts. Here not only individual reflection is included, but also shared values, organizational cultures and processes of systemic transformation (Ankrah et al. 2023).

5.4.2 The Sustainability Mindset Principles

In her book “The sustainability mindset principles” Rimanoczy (2021) introduces a conceptual framework designed to support the transformation of mindsets as a foundation for sustainable development. Her aim is to empower educators their students to integrate inner sustainability into their teaching not only by providing cognitive content, but by inspiring students to go through a shift in underlying beliefs, values, and assumptions. She argues that lasting change in the world requires more than external action and it involves developing inner capacities that enable individuals to relate differently to themselves, others, and the world (Rimanoczy 2021, Ivanova and Rimanoczy 2022).

For Rimanoczy, a sustainable mindset is “a way of thinking and being that results from a broad understanding of the ecosystem’s manifestations, from social sensitivity, as well as an introspective focus on one’s personal values and higher self and finds its expression in actions for the greater good of the whole” (Rimanoczy 2021:19).

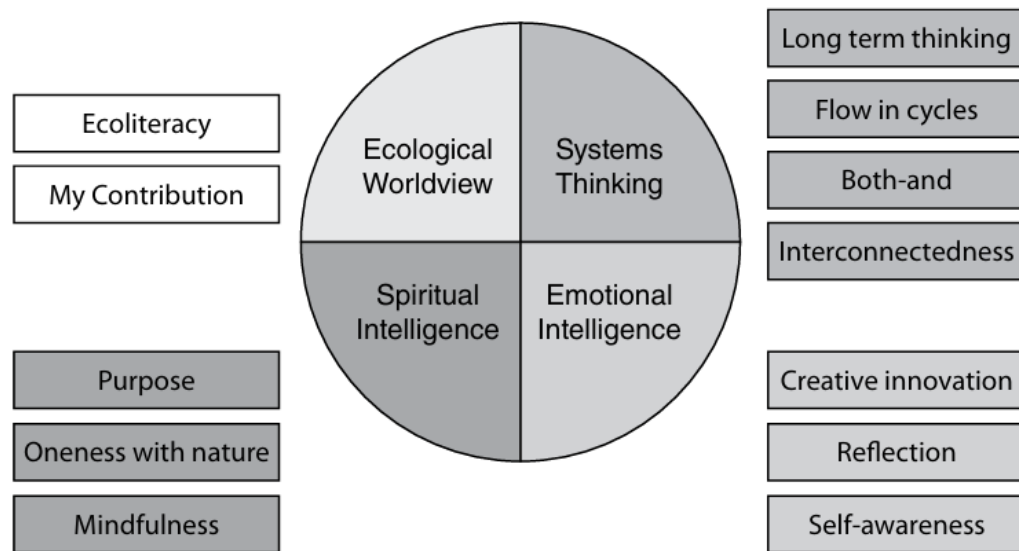


Figure 6: The 12 Sustainability Mindset Principles (Rimanoczy 2021: 21).

To support this shift, Rimanoczy presents twelve guiding principles that promote the development of a holistic sustainability mindset, see Figure 6. These principles are grouped into four domains: (1) *ecological worldview*, which includes understanding planetary systems and one's personal impact; (2) *systems thinking*, which emphasizes long-term thinking, complexity, and interconnection; (3) *emotional intelligence*, which includes reflection, self-awareness, and creative engagement; and (4) *spiritual intelligence*, which refers to cultivating purpose, mindfulness, and a sense of connection with nature. Together, the Sustainability Mindset Principles offer a structured yet adaptable framework for integrating inner development into sustainability education and practice (Rimanoczy 2021).

5.4.3 Future Skills

With the book “Die Kunst des Wandels” Stockinger and Buchebner introduce another framework, distinguishing between three sectors: the cognitive, the emotional and the spiritual. The authors aim to provide a practical framework for engaging with inner development, particularly in the context of transformative learning and changing processes.

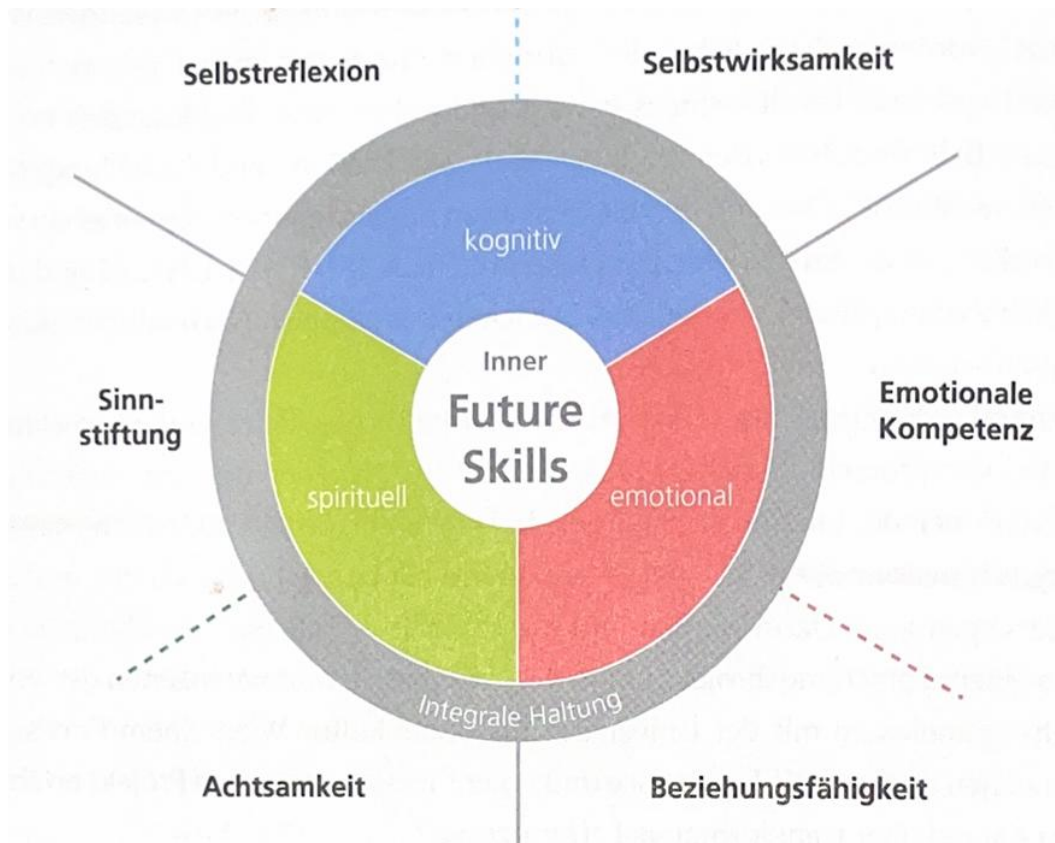


Figure 7: Inner future skills (Stockinger and Buchebner 2024:20).

Building on scientific work Stockinger and Buchebner adapt this broad skill set into a simplified model tailored for training and practical application. Specifically, it condenses the IDG framework into six overarching "Inner Future Skills," organized according to a three-stage process: beginning with values and cognitive patterns, moving through emotional reflection, and culminating in the re-examination and possible realignment of worldviews and sense of purpose. Embedded in the integral theory (Wilber and Petersen 2007), the three different parts each encompass two skills: The *cognitive level* includes self-reflection and self-actualization; The *emotional level* is characterized by emotional competence and the ability to relate; and the two *spiritual skills* are mindfulness and the ability to create meaning (see Figure 7).

Although these six skills do not capture the full complexity of inner development, they provide guiding concepts for dialogue, training and personal growth. The model takes into account the natural overlaps between the competencies, such as the connection between emotional

competence and self-reflection or the role of empathy in interpersonal skills, while providing a structured method for developing the inner skills that are essential for sustainable transformation (Stockinger and Buchebner 2024).

5.5 Scaling of inner Sustainability

Addressing today's pressing global environmental issues requires sustainability solutions to expand in ways that are fair, inclusive, and responsive to complex, non-linear dynamics (Powell 2019). Scaling has been described by Schut et al. (2020:1) as "the adaptation, uptake and use of innovations like practices, technologies, and market or policy arrangements across broader communities of actors and/or geographies." Similarly Moore and Milkoreit (2020) state that broadening a transformation and scaling it to a wider market or geographical space, should not be minimized as a cause-effect-analysis, as it would be too shallow to assume that scaling is only about the dynamics of interactions between the individual and the collective. In line with this, Moore et al. (2015:74) add that changes in "people's hearts and minds, their values, and cultural practices" have the power to "scale deep", as these changes hold the power to change structures and social relations. For the context of this thesis, this is transferred to the MLP: Scaling in this context refers to the process by which a topic or innovation on niche level becomes more accessible, accepted, and structurally embedded across various levels of society (Geels 2002). According to this perspective, scaling of inner sustainability as a niche innovation occurs when it successfully breaks through into the regime level, either gradually or through abrupt transitions triggered by landscape pressures and thus scale deep. The broad societal anchoring of inner sustainability refers to the process of expanding an innovation to the extent that it exerts a widespread societal influence, potentially transforming or structurally altering existing systems (WBGU 2011, Moore et al. 2015)

Currently, inner sustainability is primarily a niche concept and practice. Despite an increasing number of publications highlighting its important role in the transition to sustainability, its influence is still limited. The more people practice inner sustainability, the greater its influence on society. Since inner sustainability targets the deepest level of system impact and not just the

parameters, feedback or design of systems (as described by Meadows 1999), the potential for systemic influence is particularly great. Because inner sustainability directly addresses cultural narratives, beliefs and worldviews, it has the potential to have a significant impact on regime-level structures (Ives et al. 2023, Woiwode et al. 2021).

Aligned with this, Ives et al. (2020) argue that the inner workings of human beings act as the primary catalyst for unsustainable behavior. Therefore, developing inner sustainability is not only desirable but also necessary to address the causes of social and ecological disasters. Proposing a series of action areas at the individual, group and system levels to transfer this understanding to broader social applications, Ives et al. (2023) bring forward different ideas. These include the development of communities of practice and spaces for sense-making and discussion in groups, as well as the promotion of education and training initiatives that foster resilience and self-reflection.

How this theoretical knowledge can be translated into practical implementation and scaled beyond niche circles is a remaining question and challenge. Experiential and participatory practices that incorporate and experiment with inner transformation can help to give an answer (Woiwode et al. 2021). According to the authors, the art of hosting, co-creative forms of reflection, and community-based projects can be used as drivers for sustainable living, and thus help to promote this scaling process. According to Ives et al. (2020), institutions and organizations can integrate inner sustainability through mindfulness- and compassion-based leadership models, while education systems should incorporate reflective practices and emotional intelligence to promote inner skills. Innovations, as Geels (2002) argues, only becomes scalable when they go beyond isolated experiments and is structurally and culturally embedded at broader social levels. The next two chapters try to give an overview of how this implementation of inner sustainability can be achieved and what best practices there are in the DACH-region.

6 Results

6.1 Cluster Analysis

After completing the analysis of relevant actors as shown in chapter 2.1, the next logical step in this research was the development of a typology to structure and interpret the observed patterns. The primary aim of this typology is to cluster the identified actors into coherent groups based on shared characteristics, thereby gaining a deeper understanding of the field's structure and internal diversity. This step is directly related to the second research question and helps to map the niche of inner sustainability in the DACH region.

6.1.1 Identification of categories

A central question in the development of the typology was: What criteria should be used to distinguish between actor types? Several options were considered, such as differences in how actors define or interpret inner sustainability. It is important to note that many actors in the field of personal development do not explicitly engage with the term “sustainability”. However, this does not negate the potential value of their contributions. Even if their connection to sustainability is not explicitly stated, they may still play a role in fostering inner capacities that are foundational for long-term cultural and systemic change.

Another category that was considered was the degree of institutionalization, referring to an actor's formalization, structural embeddedness, and organizational stability. It measures an actor's degree of institutional framework adherence as well as the likelihood that their actions will be sustainable, reproducible, and incorporated into larger society institutions. Based on the screening of the actors, the degree of institutionalization was assessed along three levels based on the following criteria:

- **Low:** The activities of actors who are mostly operating as individuals or informal initiatives without legal structure or organizational backing are often flexible, personal, and community-based.
- **Medium:** Small to mid-sized organizations with some formal structure and a clear brand identity, recurring programs, and some team

members or partnerships, but still operating with access to limited resources and infrastructure.

- High: Well-established organizations with not only formal legal status, but also a defined leadership structure, institutional partnerships, and long-term strategic orientation.

The degree of institutionalization provides valuable insight into the structural formality and potential scalability of an actor, but was not selected as a primary criterion for typology formation in this study: Based on the observation that institutionalization does not necessarily correlate with an actor's transformative orientation or their positioning within the field of inner sustainability this decision has been made. Highly institutionalized actors may focus on individual wellbeing without engaging in broader sustainability goals, while less formalized initiatives can demonstrate a strong systemic orientation and since the core objective of this typology is to understand how actors conceptually and strategically relate to societal transformation, rather than as a basis for type distinction institutionalization it was instead included as a complementary analytic factor

Although the Inner Development Goals (IDGs) provide a holistic framework to classify the inner dimensions of sustainability, they were not a primary analytical category in this study. The main objective of this research is to create a meta-level mapping of actors dealing with inner sustainability, and the IDGs may not fully represent the range of perspectives and methods used in this field. Therefore, certain IDG characteristics are not assigned to specific actors in this study, even though the IDGs may influence the field and contribute to the discussion on inner sustainability. Instead, greater emphasis is placed on a more comprehensive typological and narrative analysis that better aligns with the exploratory and field-mapping objectives of the study.

Other considerations for the building of a typology were the actor's overarching visions and motivations, the way they communicate the concept of inner sustainability (explicitly or implicitly), and the specific sub-niche they operate within (e.g., mental health, coaching, spirituality, or Inner

Development Goals). These dimensions are all potentially relevant, but not all are equally suited as the primary organizing logic.

To ensure theoretical coherence with the multi-level perspective (MLP), the decision was made to focus the typology primarily on the degree of system orientation in the actors' work. In other words, the classification is based on how strongly the actor's communication and work refer to a broader systemic change. This decision aligns with the core idea of the MLP, which understands niches as protected spaces where innovations emerge that may challenge or eventually transform dominant regime structures. The extent to which the actors understand inner sustainability as a strategic lever for societal transformation, is especially relevant to understand in order to differentiate actors not by their thematic origin alone.

Three main types were thus defined:

- Type 1: Individually-transformative: These actors focus primarily on individual development, self-awareness, and personal growth and – while societal change and sustainability is often referred to in their vision statement as a broader goal – it is not directly reflected in their daily work. As the concept of inner sustainability is not explicitly referenced or integrated into a systemic framework, the link between personal and societal transformation remains abstract. Key idea: “Improve yourself to improve your life.”
- Type 2: System-aware personal development: These actors explicitly frame their programs as contributing to a sustainable or just society and position inner development as a relevant factor in systemic transformation. Even doing so, their offers still primarily target the individual, as inner sustainability is named and integrated into their theory of change, but participants are not necessarily expected to act beyond the personal level. Key idea: “When individuals thrive consciously, they support systemic change indirectly.”
- Type 3: Systemically-transformative: Explicitly aiming to empower people as agents of change, their work targets individuals who are already socially or environmentally engaged or who aspire to be. Framing inner development as a tool for engaging in complex

societal systems, often in education, leadership, or organizational transformation with the following key idea: “The world needs inner development to empower changemakers and transform systems.”

An important distinction must be made between the stated vision of an actor and the actual positioning and focus of their practice. Many actors in this field articulate a desire to contribute to societal change in their vision statements. As soon as the actual offerings remain focused exclusively on personal wellbeing and with no focus on addressing systemic structures or collective dimensions, they are not categorized as systemically-transformative in this typology. Therefore, the typology is not based on aspirational narratives but on the concrete orientation and implementation of each actor’s work.

Furthermore, it is important to note that this typology does not attempt to quantify the actual influence of the actors. Even though a single transformative actor can make a significant contribution to social change, this study focuses on how the actors position themselves rather than empirically evaluating their long-term contributions.

By making these distinctions transparent, the typology serves as a practical tool for mapping the field of inner sustainability in a way that reflects both its internal diversity and its transformative ambitions. In the following chapters the three categories will be explored in detail, and the different actors will be presented in the relevant category.

6.1.2 Overview and general observations

This section provides an overview of the actor landscape analyzed within the context of inner sustainability in the DACH region. In total, 21 actors were examined (see Table 2). The majority are based in Germany (11) and Austria (9), with only a single actor located in Switzerland, as shown in Figure 8. The map reveals notable spatial clustering, particularly in Vienna, where six of the 21 analyzed actors are based. Additional minor clusters appear in Berlin and Baden Baden. All other actors are distributed across different cities within the DACH region, with only one actor per location.

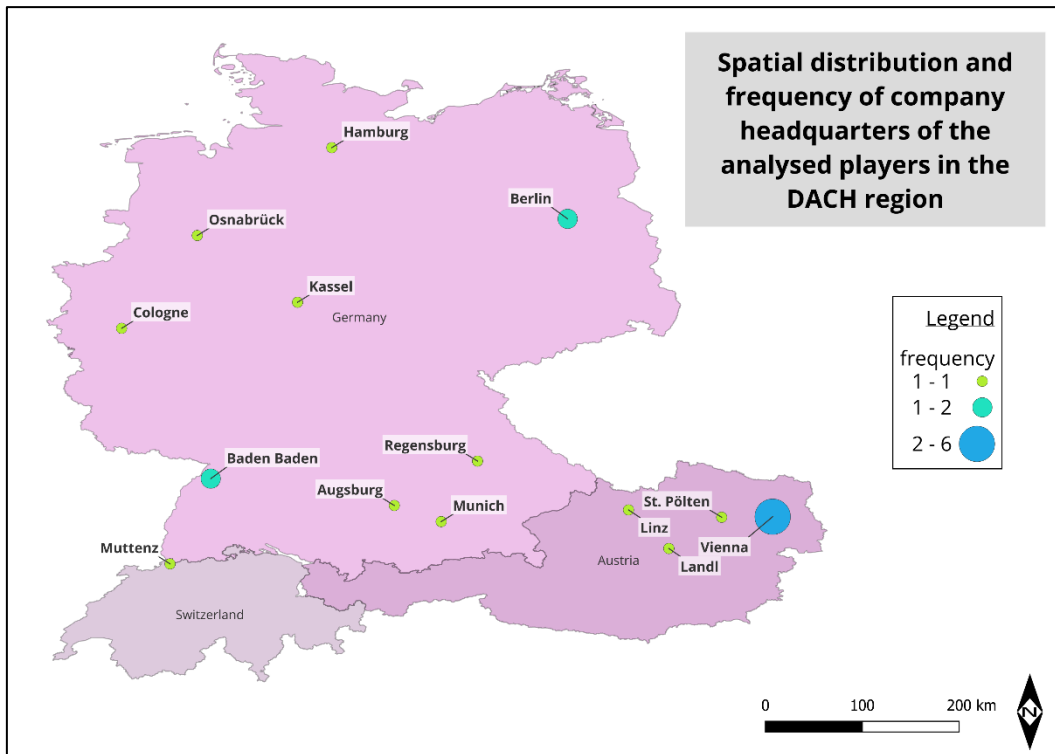


Figure 8: Spatial distribution and frequency of headquarters (own illustration).

Although urban centers like Berlin, Munich, Vienna, and Cologne emerged as significant hubs, many actors operate primarily online or in hybrid formats. This is illustrated in Figure 9, where the mode of operation is shown in reference to the spatial distribution of the company's headquarters. Seven of the analyzed actors work offline, eight have a hybrid model and six use an online business model.

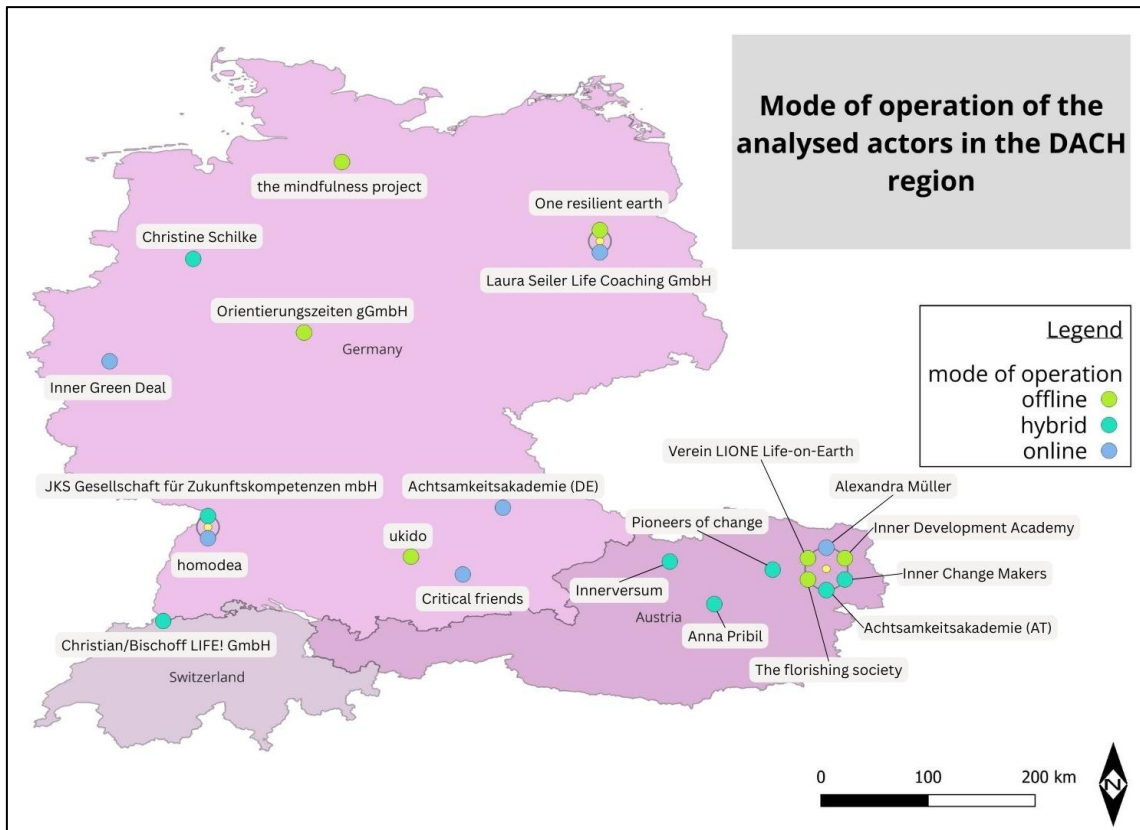


Figure 9: Mode of operation of the analyzed actors (own illustration).

As a result, the geographical location of an organization does not necessarily correspond to the spatial reach or actual impact of its offerings.

	Name	Based in	Legal Form	system orientation
Actor				Type 1
1	Laura Seiler Life Coaching GmbH	Berlin	GmbH	Individually-transformative
2	Achtsamkeitsakademie (DE)	Regensburg	GmbH	Individually-transformative
3	Achtsamkeitsakademie (AT)	Vienna	n.a.	Individually-transformative
4	homodea	Baden Baden	GmbH	Individually-transformative
5	Christian/Bischoff LIFE! GmbH	Muttenz	AG	Individually-transformative
Actor				Type 2
6	JKS Gesellschaft für Zukunftskompetenzen mbH	Baden Baden	GmbH	System-aware personal development
7	Orientierungszeiten gGmbH	Kassel	gGmbH (non-profit)	System-aware personal development

8	Alexandra Müller	Vienna	individual actors	System-aware personal development
9	Anna Pribil	Landl	individual actors	System-aware personal development
10	Christine Schilke	Osna-brück	individual actors	System-aware personal development
11	the mindfulness project	Hamburg	non-profit organization (Verein)	System-aware personal development
Actor			Type 3	
12	Inner Green Deal	Cologne	gGmbH (non-profit)	Systemically-transformative
13	Inner Change Makers	Vienna	OG	Systemically-transformative
14	Pioneers of change	St. Pölten	non-profit organization (Verein)	Systemically-transformative
15	Inner Development Academy	Vienna	n.a.	Systemically-transformative
16	Innerversum	Linz	GmbH	Systemically-transformative
17	The flourishing society	Vienna	non-profit organization (Verein)	Systemically-transformative
18	Critical friends	Munich	non-profit organization (Verein)	Systemically-transformative
19	ukido	Augsburg	GbR	Systemically-transformative
20	Verein LIONE Life-on-Earth	Vienna	non-profit organization (Verein)	Systemically-transformative
21	One resilient earth	Berlin	non-profit organization (Verein)	Systemically-transformative

Table 2: Typification of the 21 analyzed actors according to the three defined types.

The legal forms represented within this field range from formal institutional structures (e.g., GmbH, gGmbH, AG, OG, GbR) and registered non-profit organizations (Verein) to informal arrangements, including individual actors and loose networks, see Table 2. Most actors have between 2 and 50 staff members and pursue a variety of financing models, including commercial, donation-based, and hybrid approaches. The degree of institutionalization

similarly varies, ranging from solo entrepreneurs to highly structured organizations with permanent staff and formal partnerships. This reflects both the openness and dynamics of the field, while simultaneously highlighting its fragmentation and strong reliance on individual initiative. Figure 10 shows a map with the spatial distribution of the three categories.

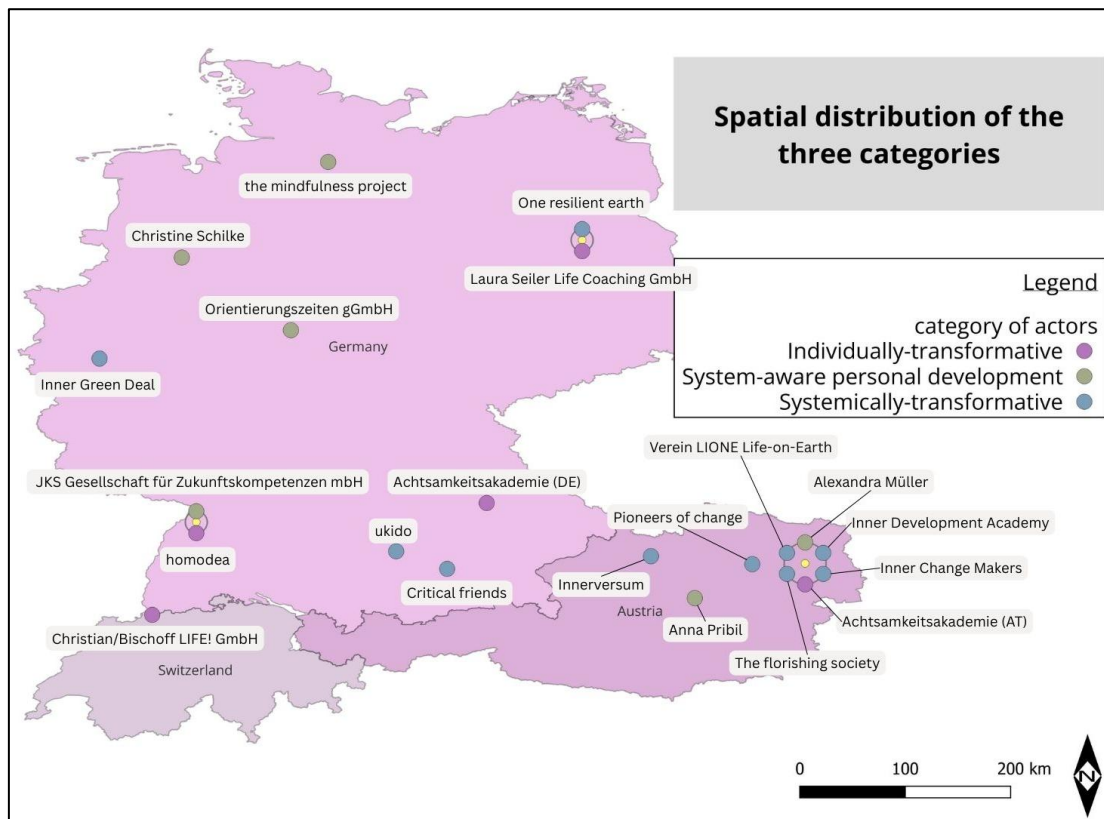


Figure 10: Spatial distribution of the three categories (own illustration).

Across the actors, a common underlying premise is the belief in the transformative potential of inner work for fostering more sustainable societal outcomes. Yet, the ways in which this belief is framed and operationalized diverge significantly. A significant proportion of actors focus on supporting individuals in moments of transition – addressing questions of meaning, emotional resilience, or personal growth – and position inner sustainability primarily as a pathway for individual well-being and self-development. By presenting it as a critical lever for addressing collective sustainability challenges, others explicitly link inner sustainability to systemic and ecological transformation. Some actors, for example the Inner Green Deal or Pioneers of Change, see the enhancement of inner sustainability as a

foundation for systemic change and embed it directly within their narratives, aligning their offerings with wider social, economic, and ecological transformation.

The offerings and approaches in this industry are equally diverse and include books, podcasts, online courses, retreats, train-the-trainer programs and community platforms. In terms of methodology, the most popular techniques are coaching, personal development and mindfulness; less popular strategies such as systemic organizational development or IDG-based treatments are also used. Although they have their roots in the DACH region, many players can operate globally thanks to a strong focus on digital platforms and virtual offerings.

The way sustainability is defined varies, although many stakeholders express a desire for a ‘better world’ and emphasize their role in promoting a more sustainable society. Sustainability is sometimes seen as an unspoken by-product of personal development, making the connection to ecological or systemic change indirect. In other cases, sustainability is clearly formulated as a fundamental principle, and internal work is positioned as an important driver of ecological, structural and social change.

Importantly, the typology developed in the following sections aims to offer a structured lens for understanding these actors within the multi-level framework of sustainability transitions. This typology should not be viewed as a fixed or absolute categorization. The boundaries between types are often fluid, and many actors operate across or between multiple dimensions. Rather, it is intended as a heuristic device for capturing common patterns, narratives, and motivations within a diverse, evolving, and still-emerging field.

6.1.3 Individually-transformative

In the present study, five actors were identified within this category: Laura Seiler Life Coaching GmbH, Achtsamkeitsakademie (DE), Achtsamkeitsakademie (AT), homodea, and Christian Bischoff LIFE! GmbH. All five emphasize personal growth and life coaching as their core focus and operate primarily online and have no distinct geographical focus. In terms of institutionalization, all demonstrate a high degree of formalization

and operate within a commercial framework, with their legal status registered as GmbH or AG.

The main goal is to promote emotional development, self-awareness and individual development. Their services focus on life counselling and personal well-being and promote inner transformation as a means to a more balanced and contented life. This relationship usually remains on a visionary level and is not incorporated into the actual teaching, although these actors integrate their work into a larger vision of social transformation. The abstract recognition of the connection between individual and systemic change is not operationalized in their programs, and the concept of 'inner sustainability' is neither explicitly mentioned nor integrated into a systemic framework. The central narrative can be summarized as: "Improve yourself to improve your life."

The actors grouped within this typology present a diverse yet coherent picture of approaches that only implicitly link inner sustainability to systemic change. A common feature across these actors is a strong focus on the individual as the entry point for broader transformation, although many embed this within wider narratives that connect personal growth to systemic shifts. The fact that several actors often focus their offers on specific target groups, such as young adults or those seeking to build resilience and emotional well-being, shows that operating within highly niche areas, like relationships, mindfulness or spirituality is common. These programs place a strong focus on psychological and emotional aspects and offer early stage intervention with the aim of achieving long-term benefits for individuals and society.

Vision

Within the group of actors committed to personal transformation, one overarching goal stands out: the desire to use personal growth to contribute to the transformation of society. Even though the main goals of their programmes are personal development, emotional recovery and self-determination, the majority of actors present their work as a prerequisite for more significant social change. However, different actors convey this social relevance to varying degrees.

Some organizations – such as homodea or the Achtsamkeitsakademie (DE) – explicitly state that their mission is to change the world by supporting the inner transformation of individuals. In their narrative a combination of strong idealistic visions with a belief in the ripple effect of individual change on collective systems can be observed. Others, such as Christian Bischoff, communicate this linkage more cautiously, which is reflected in focusing primarily on personal success and fulfillment, with the potential societal implications of this work remaining only implicit. This is also the case with Laura Seiler, as she describes her work as helping people to ignite the light within themselves, thereby becoming a positive influence in the world around them. More explicit homodea openly declares its ambition to change the world by working with individuals – positioning the individual not as an endpoint, but as a starting point for collective transformation.

Understanding of inner sustainability

When sustainability is mentioned, it usually refers to a more traditional, external use of the term, such as the use of environmentally friendly products or support for environmental projects. Laura Seiler, for example, emphasizes the use of ethical production methods in her product line and sustainable printing processes for her books. As part of its ecological contribution, die Achtsamkeitsakademie (DE) also points out that trees are planted via a meditation app. In both cases, sustainability is not presented as systemic change based on internal capabilities, but largely in terms of environmental responsibility.

Being valuable on its own, it is common to understand inner work itself as a key factor in improving one's life with an underlying assumption that with this, increased self-awareness and emotional well-being contribute to a better world. In many narratives this “inside-out” logic can be observed: if individuals become more mindful, fulfilled, and self-aware, this will eventually ripple outward and support positive societal change. Being a rather abstract connection, it is not operationalized in terms of sustainability policy, systems thinking, or explicit contributions to broader societal transitions.

Target Group(s)

People who are going through a phase of personal change, emotional turmoil or identity formation are the main target group of individually transformative actors. People seeking greater self-confidence, inner strength or a connection to their beliefs and goals are often among their audience. This includes students, young professionals, entrepreneurs and individuals working in the helping professions, as freelancers, in creative or other non-traditional institutional contexts and career paths .

A common feature among the actors is a focus on people experiencing inner tension, stress, or dissatisfaction, who are therefore open to practices such as mindfulness, coaching, or emotional healing. While most offerings are clearly designed for individuals, some actors – such as Achtsamkeitsakademie (AT) – also provide programs for professional contexts, including institutions, teams, or schools.

Offered Transformation

Actors in the individually-transformative category promise a transformation that focuses primarily on the individual. In each case, transformation is presented as a path for individuals to achieve emotional strength, authenticity and inner balance. By unleashing their inner potential, people can lead more meaningful and powerful lives, rather than explicitly promoting structural change.

The idea that every person has a creative inner power that enables them to consciously change their lives when it is awakened is a central theme in the communication of several actors. This idea of self-efficacy and inner mastery plays a crucial role in how change is imagined. Similarly, the Achtsamkeitsakademie (AT) links individual development with broader social benefit, suggesting that those who grow with joy and openness can indirectly contribute to making the world a better place.

The actors emphasize themes such as self-acceptance, potential realization, emotional balance, and mental clarity. Programs are typically designed to foster inner peace, improve interpersonal relationships, increase confidence, or reduce stress, particularly through methods like mindset work, guided reflection, and emotional awareness.

Offers and Communication Channels

There is a broad and diverse portfolio of products and services, with a strong emphasis on scalable, digital formats. Self-paced online courses, guided journaling tools, digital coaching programmes, podcasts, and live or recorded webinar series are examples of common services. Most providers also offer books or other printed resources, often written in-house, to supplement their internet content and expand their audience for their techniques.

The proliferation of internet distribution, which enables flexible and cost-effective access across regional boundaries, is a notable trend. The overarching goal of the players to empower people on a large scale is supported by this digital focus, which ensures both scalability and continuity of participation. Another distinguishing feature is the development of proprietary coaching certifications by nearly all actors in this category (with the exception of Achtsamkeitsakademie DE). These programs not only deepen participant engagement but also create communities of practice that carry the actors' methodologies further into the public sphere, through which they educate multipliers. In this way, the actors simultaneously serve as educators, content creators, and brand platforms for inner transformation.

The examined organizations exhibit a strong emphasis on digital communication channels, prominently utilizing websites, social media platforms, podcasts, and newsletters to engage their audiences. To be appealing to digitally native individuals with a pronounced interest in self-help and personal development, their content is professionally branded and strategically designed. Additionally to that, the marketing tone consistently adopts a motivational and charismatic style, frequently revolving around the founder's personal narrative and life experiences. Notably, all organizations maintain an active podcast presence, which further underscores their professional and well-structured approach to content dissemination.

Methodology

A combination of coaching, mindfulness and psychology determines the methodological strategies used by actors in the category of 'individual transformation'. The concept of personal empowerment through self-

awareness, attitude training and emotional resilience is at the heart of their work. Although the exact methods differ, the main goal is to offer easily understandable, useful resources that promote personal development without requiring in-depth theoretical knowledge.

This group combines the use of both ancient and modern materials. Many practitioners are influenced by spiritual traditions such as Buddhism, but they present these influences in a way that is inclusive, secular and suitable for a wide audience. This spiritual foundation is often combined with mindfulness studies and evidence-based techniques from contemporary psychology. For example, guided meditation, self-reflection exercises, and journaling prompts are standard tools, often embedded in digital formats.

The programmes combine emotional and somatic techniques (e.g. breathing exercises, visualisation, body awareness) with cognitive components (e.g. attitude coaching) to promote both reflection and action. Most actors use internet forums or organised group programmes to promote peer and community learning in addition to their individual work. Their approach, which seeks to engage participants on an intellectual, emotional and spiritual level while keeping the barriers to entry low, focuses on this comprehensive integration of feeling, thinking and practice.

6.1.4 System-aware personal development

In total, six actors were identified within this category: JKS Gesellschaft für Zukunftskompetenzen mbH, Orientierungszeiten gGmbH, Alexandra Müller, Anna Pribil, Christine Schilke, and The Mindfulness Project. These actors range from smaller individual practitioners to more formal organizations and are registered under a variety of legal forms, including GmbHs, gGmbHs, and non-profit structures. The institutionalization levels vary, meaning that they include highly structured entities as well as more flexible individual offerings. Operating often online without focusing on a specific geographical region, makes their services accessible to a broad and widely spread target group. Looking at the kind of engagement the actors have with inner sustainability, a mix of direct and indirect connections emerges, reflecting the diverse ways this concept is applied and

communicated within this typology. The financial models vary from commercial models to donation-based models.

This category comprises actors that explicitly frame their work within the context of a sustainable or just society. They recognize and articulate inner sustainability as an integral component of systemic transformation, positioning it as a relevant factor in shaping social, ecological, and economic outcomes. At the core of their approach is the belief that individual growth and well-being have the potential to support broader systemic change. However, while their offerings emphasize the personal sphere, participants are not necessarily required or expected to extend their engagement beyond their own inner work. The central narrative can be summarized as: “When individuals thrive consciously, they support systemic change.”

An overarching strong commitment to fostering systemic change through inner transformation, combining a deep focus on mindfulness, interpersonal connection, and nature-based consciousness is a fact that combines the actors in this type. The belief that broad societal shifts can be catalyzed through profound inner work at the individual level unites them and makes them framing their approaches often within a holistic understanding of sustainability, wherein personal, interpersonal, and ecological dimensions are deeply interlinked.

A strong external focus in their narratives is a notable feature across this typology, with narratives that show how they are motivated by an urgent need to “save the world” or to drive global change. Although this focus brings meaning to their services, it also harbors the risk of making them less attractive to people seeking direct support for their personal challenges. The tension between aspirational narratives and concrete, individually oriented benefits raise questions about the scalability and accessibility of their impact and is further discussed later accordingly with the insights from the interviews.

The actors differ significantly in terms of how established they are and what they mainly focus on. Some offer highly developed, concept-driven programs that approach topics from a strong theoretical and critical perspective, often with the aim of questioning mainstream narratives and

examining social structures. These approaches are generally quite academic and abstract, focusing more on depth than wide range accessibility. In contrast, there are also actors who take a more hands-on approach and by providing a broad selection of courses, training, and tools that focus on making inner sustainability practical and adaptable across various contexts make it more accessible to a broader target group. At the same time, there are some whose activities appear more fragmented or primarily shaped by ideology, making it hard to clearly identify their methods or unique advantages. This can make it challenging to fully assess what they offer overall.

Vision

The actors have a clearly defined shared vision that goes beyond personal well-being. In every case, social or environmental change is explicitly mentioned as a priority goal. Inner work is presented as a first step towards achieving greater social influence, rather than as a goal in itself. Terms such as 'resilience', 'cultural change' and 'future skills' are frequently used in their mission statements and narratives. The realization that the world is changing rapidly and is often overwhelming is a recurring theme and is explicitly mentioned as a factor in the need to build inner capabilities. Alexandra Müller, for example, emphasizes the severity of current global changes and points out that the enormous transformation of the world can often be overwhelming. Similarly, Christine Schilke underscores the importance of supporting individuals in navigating complexity to foster systemic coherence and adaptability.

Although all actors place great emphasis on personal development, they view their activities within a broader systemic framework in which changing oneself is seen as a prerequisite for changing society. By specifically providing people with the inner resources, they need to tackle difficult social problems, these actors hope to actively contribute to a more just, sustainable and livable future.

Understanding of Inner Sustainability

Within this actor group, inner sustainability is more frequently and explicitly addressed than in the first typology. Many actors explicitly name the term or

describe it in closely related language, often positioning it as a foundational requirement for navigating societal and ecological transformation. Inner sustainability is framed as a response to the urgency and complexity of a rapidly changing world, where outer crises are understood to have their roots in internal, human-generated dynamics.

The actors frequently define inner sustainability through concepts such as emotional resilience, self-awareness, value alignment, and the capacity to connect inner states with external actions. The organization Orientierungszeiten, for example, opens its vision with the statement that the Earth is burning, clearly acknowledging the planetary crisis and suggesting that internal transformation is essential to confronting it. In a comparable way, the Mindfulness Project highlights that the current issues are man-made and result from people's damaging thought patterns, which create dysfunctional communities. Connections to more general global frameworks, like the SDGs, are made in several instances, highlighting the realization that solving sustainability issues calls for both systemic and psychological change. The fact that they specifically mention and identify global sustainability concerns sets them apart from the first group.

Target Group(s)

Several actors emphasize pedagogy and target younger generations by which they seek to embed the principles of inner sustainability as a foundation for future change agents. This trend reflects the actors' effort to make inner work across society more normal and to contribute to cultivating long-term systemic shifts starting with younger generations. Others within this group have pivoted towards aligning inner sustainability with professional roles in the sustainability sector, merging inner and outer sustainability into a targeted, vocational focus.

What's reoccurring is the emphasis on supporting individuals who are seeking meaningful orientation in times of uncertainty or disruption, e.g. including for example young people who are – after completing formal education – searching for purpose, women navigating leadership roles while resisting conventional performance pressures (e.g., Alexandra Müller), or individuals striving to live in a more conscious and sustainable way.

In addition to individuals, several actors also explicitly target multipliers such as educators, coaches, or organizational leaders, as these actors position their work as contributing not only to individual well-being but also to broader ripple effects in professional or collective settings. JKS Gesellschaft für Zukunftskompetenzen mbH for example engages people interested in integrating inner development and future competencies into leadership, collaboration, and systemic transformation.

The underlying motivations of the addressed audiences include a strong desire for mental health and emotional self-care, a wish to step out of constant over-functioning, and a longing for deeper connection with oneself, with others, and with societal purpose. Many of the actors also provide spaces for belonging and value-based community building, emphasizing the need for collective resonance in a fragmented world. The actors of this type therefore address a target group that is aware of the social and sustainability challenges of the modern age.

Offered Transformation

The transformational offerings of the actors in the System-aware personal development category are characterized by a dual focus. First, fostering personal resilience and self-understanding is aimed at while – secondly – embedding these processes within a broader societal relevance. Across all actors, the notion of transformation is not limited to an individually focused improvement of one's own life but is framed as a response to systemic and ecological challenges. Inner work is therefore positioned as a critical foundation for coping with complexity, navigating uncertainty, and contributing societal change in a meaningful way.

A core objective across many of the programs is to help individuals find orientation in what is frequently described as a time of multiple, overlapping crises. Terms such as challenging times are recurrent in program descriptions and narrative framings. The offerings aim to build emotional resilience, enhance clarity, and support people in reconnecting with personal values and purpose. This transformation is for example within the Bachelor of Being of Orientierungszeiten often facilitated through structured learning journeys and developmental frameworks.

The role of participants as potential facilitators of change in their professional or social environments is emphasized by some actors additionally. Within the programs not only personal development is addressed but the goal also lies in equipping participants with tools and competencies relevant for societal transformation. Thus, the transformation is both inward-facing (supporting self-discovery and well-being) and outward-facing (enabling participants to act as conscious contributors to social and ecological regeneration).

The integration of transformation into a broader societal context is particularly salient in initiatives such as The Mindfulness Project, where they declare that the development of people's full potential, creativity and vitality is more important than external structures such as houses or gardens. This reflects a shared belief that inner alignment and consciousness are indispensable foundations for addressing the larger crises of our time.

Offers and Communication Channels

The programs typically include a combination of formats such as retreats, online courses, coaching sessions, and hybrid models. While some actors focus on fully online offerings, others operate primarily offline. Orientierungszeiten and The Mindfulness Project provide immersive, in-person experiences without offering digital programs. This indicates a preference in parts of this category for relational, embodied learning formats. At the same time, the presence of hybrid models suggests an attempt to broaden accessibility and scale, while maintaining depth and experiential quality.

All actors use websites and basic social media channels for outreach, though the intensity and style of communication differ. In contrast to the first actor type, promotional language is generally more grounded, informative, and oriented toward value communication rather than branding or emotional appeal. While some actors, such as Alexandra Müller, include newsletters or blogs, only one actor actively uses a podcast format to engage audiences. Overall, communication in this category appears to prioritize content integrity over marketing strategies, aligning with most actors' emphasis on meaningful change over commercial growth.

Methodology

The methodological foundations are characterized by a high degree of interdisciplinarity and scientific orientation. Coaching, psychology-focused training, and mindfulness-based techniques form the baseline of most approaches, often enriched by elements of systemic theory, emotional intelligence, or positive psychology: Several actors explicitly reference scientifically grounded methods such as neuroscience-informed resilience practices or structured reflection tools and are suggesting a strong emphasis on evidence-based and effective interventions.

Innovative pedagogical models also emerged in this actor group like the program ‘Bachelor of Being’ created by the organization Orientierungszeiten, where they exemplify a novel educational framework that integrates inner development with systemic awareness, thereby expanding the methodological repertoire beyond conventional coaching or training settings.

6.1.5 Systemically-transformative

This category comprises actors that position inner development as a tool for empowering people to become agents of systemic change and name this explicitly. Their offerings are aimed at individuals already engaged or about to engage in social or environmental transformation, while focusing on the interplay between personal growth and systemic impact. In this context, inner sustainability is framed intentionally as a catalyst for navigating and reshaping complex societal structures, so the central premise of this typology can be expressed as: “We need inner development to empower changemakers and transform systems.”

A total of ten actors were identified within this category. These actors operate across a range of institutional forms, including commercial, donation-based, and foundation- or grant-supported models. All have a direct and explicit reference to inner sustainability, as this term is embedded within their offerings, by which they are making it a core component of their approach. The actors use a mix of online and offline tools, although their focus is predominantly online. They range from highly formalized institutions with permanent staff and management structures to more informally

organized initiatives, which shows that the degree to which they are institutionalized varies greatly.

With many actors presenting themselves as motivated by an urgent need to ‘save the world’ or to drive global change, a notable feature across this typology is the strong external focus in their narratives. Some present highly sophisticated, concept-driven offerings with a strong theoretical and critical lens, which leads to the conclusion that they focus more on challenging dominant narratives and questioning societal paradigms. This is also demonstrated in some actors’ tendency to use terms that come from a highly academic and abstract background that emphasizes depth in the theories of inner sustainability, instead of using easy-to-understand language to make the offers more accessible. In contrast, others operate with a more practical orientation, offering a diverse range of courses, training programs, and tools aimed at making inner sustainability actionable and applicable across settings.

Vision

Unlike in the previous categories, where personal well-being or individual growth might be emphasized as goals in themselves, these actors position their work within the broader context of societal and ecological transformation, which shows that the actors grouped within this category share a clearly articulated, systemically oriented vision. The driving motivation across all actors is the desire to contribute meaningfully to global challenges, either through fostering cultural change, or initiating paradigm shifts, or transforming leadership and education systems.

Thus, human development is not portrayed as an endpoint, but rather as a strategic lever for systemic change as individuals are viewed as agents of transformation who, when empowered by inner clarity and resilience, are capable of catalyzing change on a larger scale. Many actors state this connection between inner growth and outer impact in an explicit manner, highlighting the role of their work in enabling more sustainable, just, and regenerative societies. The “why” behind their engagement is consistently framed in relation to making the world a better place, relating to a shared,

foundational motivation that permeates both the design of their programs and the narratives they communicate publicly.

Understanding of inner sustainability

Actors in the systemically-transformative category demonstrate a highly reflective and integrative understanding of inner sustainability and state that they don't understand inner development as a self-contained process or an end in itself, but rather as a necessary foundation for addressing the global challenges of the current times and problems humanity is facing: Inner sustainability is explicitly framed as an essential driver of broader transformation.

Many actors in this group refer directly to established sustainability frameworks. This anchoring shows that their work is conceptually and strategically embedded in current discourses on sustainable development. The connection between personal and collective well-being is made explicit: a thriving society is seen as inseparable from the inner capacities of its members.

Several actors articulate the urgency of their work by referencing the pressures of the current global crisis landscape. Many actors believe it is time for profound change, making it clear that they are aware of the severity of global crises. They see change from within as the basis for building a sustainable world. Moreover, this group often positions systemic change not only as desirable but also as possible; provided that inner values, mindsets, and emotional competencies become normalized and institutionally supported. The actors thus reflect a systems-thinking perspective that emphasizes the co-evolution of inner and outer structures as a core condition for sustainability.

Target Group(s)

The actors in this category predominantly address individuals who are already engaged with, or are aspiring to contribute to societal transformation processes. Multipliers, such as educators, sustainability professionals, facilitators, leaders, and change agents, are seen as pivotal actors in

spreading inner sustainability into broader systems, which makes it reasonable that these actors focus on them as a target group.

These actors rarely target a general audience interested in personal growth alone whereas instead, their programs are explicitly designed to empower individuals who are navigating or facilitating processes of organizational or societal change. This is also mirrored in the fact that many offerings are directed toward teams, schools, or entire organizations, reflecting a systemic orientation that goes beyond individual transformation.

Offered transformation

The programs seek to empower individuals not only to develop clarity or inner balance, but to become active agents of transformation in their personal, professional, and societal contexts. Across the actor group, transformation is presented as a dual process involving the cultivation of emotional resilience and inner clarity while strengthening the capacity to act effectively in the face of social and ecological challenges. The competencies frequently encompass leadership skills, systemic thinking, communication techniques, and self-organization. Participants will learn to initiate and sustain change processes in their organizations, communities, or broader social systems.

Offering learning environments that foster personal potential is a key strategy for actors looking to contribute to the transformation of teams or institutions. Inner Green Deal's approach is designed to assist individuals in transforming their climate anxiety and feelings of helplessness into meaningful, impactful, and environmentally-oriented actions. The Critical Friends program is designed to empower participants to initiate sustainable change in their organization, overcome resistance, and engage colleagues and leadership in future-oriented solutions.

Mindfulness-based approaches play a central role in helping participants manage emotional overwhelm, develop psychological resilience, and gain clarity for action.. Programs such as those by the Inner Change Makers emphasize developing 'Inner Future Skills' that instead of being overwhelmed by today's problems and challenges, enable individuals to navigate complexity consciously.

Offers and communication channels

Actors in this group provide a diverse array of offerings that are typically professionalized, modular, and strategically structured. Many programs are designed as multi-stage learning journeys or certification formats, with a clear emphasis on long-term engagement and multiplier effects. Rather than short-term interventions, these initiatives aim to build capacity for transformative leadership and systemic change over time.

The formats vary considerably: some actors focus on online delivery, while others offer in-person retreats, international workshops, or hybrid models. Some actors provide exclusive 'train-the-trainer' programs aimed at facilitators, educators, or organizational change agents and – despite this diversity – many share a commitment to structured, curriculum-based approaches that blend experiential and cognitive learning elements.

Communication-wise most actors maintain a strong and strategically structured digital presence, including websites that are aligned with user experience, newsletters, and social media. Several also run podcasts, publish written materials like Journals, or manage educational platforms to make their company commonly known. Overall, the communication style is professional, easy to understand, and focused on credibility, avoiding overly spiritual or emotional language. Importantly, the outreach efforts emphasize building communities of practice, knowledge-sharing, and collective learning. Communication isn't just for promotion. It's also part of bigger plans to build networks. These plans aim to have a greater impact and support a wider ecosystem of inner and outer transformation.

Methodology

The methodological approaches of systemically-transformative actors are characterized by a high degree of complexity, interdisciplinarity, and theoretical grounding. Most actors explicitly draw from well-established models such as systems thinking, Theory U, transformative learning, and the IDGs, often in conjunction with the SDGs, as these frameworks are used not only as guiding principles but are actively embedded in the structure and pedagogy of the programs offered.

Core methodological elements include a combination of systemic coaching, organizational development, mindfulness practices, facilitation, and community-based learning, and many actors integrate psychological, communicative, ecological, and social change theories, as it is evident across many self-descriptions and curricula. For example, the KI²-method applied by ukido is explicitly based on the Theory U framework developed at MIT and draws from years of practical experience in organizational transformation.

Many actors emphasize the importance of transdisciplinary approaches and cross-sectoral collaboration. Methodologies often aim to connect knowledge from diverse domains, such as science, arts, education, and civil society, in order to foster inclusive and resilient cultural movements. Initiatives such as One Resilient Earth illustrate this integrative approach by forming partnerships with scientific institutions, artists, and grassroots organizations to promote inner and outer resilience in the face of global challenges.

Across the board, there is a strong commitment to evidence-based practice. Theoretical insights are consistently paired with experiential learning and practical application, aiming to equip participants with not only the tools for self-development but also the capacities required for collective and systemic transformation.

6.2 Qualitative Interviews

This section addresses the third research question of the thesis: What barriers and opportunities do actors identify for scaling the impact of inner sustainability? The three interviewed actors are presented here for a better understanding of their background and the organization they are working in.

Liane Stephan (Inner Green Deal): Co-founder and CEO of Awaris GmbH and Inner Green Deal. Her responsibilities include managing the trainers and the coaching training program. Liane has over 30 years of experience in leadership development, mindfulness and systemic organizational development and cultural change. By emphasizing the transformation of individuals' inner worlds alongside external systemic changes, the Inner

Green Deal as an initiative from the inner sustainability niche addresses the limitations of conventional sustainability approaches. The Inner Green Deal posits that genuine systemic change requires a profound shift in how people relate to themselves, others, and nature, in contradiction to traditional frameworks like the EU Green Deal which focus lies predominantly on external environmental policies and technologies,

Marie-Imke Badur (Orientierungszeiten): initiator, developer, and director of the Bachelor of Being program. She is an experienced educator and coach with a background in cultural pedagogy, music psychology, and psychosocial competencies. She has held academic positions at the University of Kassel, contributed to service learning and civic engagement and engaged actively in sustainability and youth development initiatives. Orientierungszeiten gGmbH is the organizational body responsible for delivering the Bachelor of Being program, which represents a holistic, prolonged orientation experience for young adults that combines vocational clarity, personal resilience, and sustainability education within a communal living environment.

Elisabeth Rohrmoser (Pioneers of Change): project leader and coordinator within the leadership circle of Pioneers of Change, responsible for the "Community and Cooperation" group. With academic degrees (Mag. MA), her work focuses on community building, cooperation, and organizational development in the context of social and global change. Pioneers of Change is an organization primarily engaged in educational work, structured broadly into three key areas: inspiration, education, and community. Its mission is to inspire individuals by disseminating a vision for an alternative, sustainable world and empowering them through courage and inspiration.

The interview data were coded and analyzed along two thematic dimensions. First, statements were identified that point to barriers impeding the broader adoption and societal scaling of inner sustainability. Second, the material was analyzed for opportunities and enabling factors that could support a wider integration of inner sustainability into societal systems. As only three interviews could be conducted, the insights remain limited.

Therefore, this section provides a broad overview of the barriers mentioned. A more comprehensive understanding would require additional interviews with a more diverse set of actors.

6.2.1 Barriers

The screening of the interviews revealed a range of barriers mentioned by the three interviewees. These barriers were clustered into a set of overarching themes and are presented in the following section.

Systemic Barriers

Systemic barriers were repeatedly identified as obstacles to scaling inner sustainability. Imke-Marie Badur highlighted the educational system, stating that as long as schools operate with a grading system, genuine personality development cannot occur. Another barrier she mentioned involves societal prejudices. According to her education on inner dimensions are often dismissed as esoteric and not perceived as important or relevant. She sees potential for these societal prejudices to diminish gradually, for example, through the development of academic programs that integrate inner topics; however, she believes this progress is too slow. Another systemic barrier involves greenwashing and superficial sustainability regulations, which Liane Stephan argues lead to sustainability being approached only superficially. According to her assessment, this is possible because there are no clear and effective political directives. Furthermore, there is a low level of awareness regarding the relevance of inner sustainability at both political and societal levels. Inner development, Stephan notes, is accepted only within niche circles, and there is a lack of open communication about the need to integrate inner sustainability more broadly.

Uncertainty about how to categorize inner sustainability

Structural barriers hinder the integration of Inner Development within organizations, particularly companies. Liane Stephan explains that Inner Development often lacks clear belonging: HR and Learning & Development departments do not see it as their responsibility because it is considered a sustainability issue, while sustainability departments do not regard inner dimensions as part of their area. This siloed organizational logic prevents a holistic approach and complicates the establishment of Inner Development.

There remains a lack of understanding regarding why inner development is relevant for sustainable transformation. Elisabeth Rohrmoser also addresses this issue of uncertainty about the precise positioning of inner sustainability by highlighting the ambiguous role of Pioneers of Change. There is an ongoing process to determine where, between internal and external domains, inner sustainability should be situated. However, no definitive answer exists as to where genuine impact is generated; rather, there is a conscious struggle to find this balance. Imke-Marie Badur accordingly emphasizes that sustainability alone is not a sufficient selling point, as the concept of (inner) sustainability is often poorly understood and perceived as obstructive. She illustrates this by noting that the slogan "Grow for Future" failed to attract a broad audience in communication efforts.

Lack of willingness for actual transformation

There is a tension between the necessity of time for genuine personal transformation and the current societal tendency to avoid longer processes. Profound change can only occur when individuals engage intensively over an extended period, as Imke-Marie Badur is convinced. Short formats, like weekend seminars, are insufficient as they often provide only theoretical understanding without enabling genuine experience or transformation. At the same time, she observes a societal trend toward convenience and avoidance of depth: many people, regardless of age, prefer brief, digital offerings and are reluctant to step outside their comfort zones. There is a desire for change without fully committing to the transformative process.

Inner psychological barriers

Some individuals tend to become overly immersed in their personal or psychological difficulties, which can hinder or slow down change at both individual and collective levels. Elisabeth Rohrmoser observes that some course participants exhibit high levels of neediness or experience psychological crises. This tendency to sink into negative emotions is viewed as a barrier in the process of consciousness transformation, as it occupies considerable space and diverts focus away from collective development or overarching goals.

6.2.2 Opportunities

The analysis of the interviews also highlighted several possibilities and chances that can support the scaling of inner sustainability. These were grouped into overarching themes and are outlined in the following section.

Inner sustainability enhances the quality of one's own life

The importance of clearly communicating that inner sustainability enhances the personal lives of those engaging with it is a topic frequently mentioned in the interviews. For instance, Liane Stephan emphasized that inner sustainability can play a crucial role in preventing burnout and that – in her view – the current system produces exhausted individuals who lack the energy required to bring about genuine transformation. She explicitly states that people are only willing to engage in change when they are convinced that it provides personal value. She also notes that this perspective remains under-researched and identifies it as a significant opportunity for advancing the field of inner sustainability.

For target group oriented communication, Stephan suggests to focus on the advantages inner sustainability has on people when communicating offers. Furthermore, she highlights that letting go of the constant pressure to optimize oneself can create space for inner relief and reconnection. As soon as individuals experience themselves as inherently enough, they are able to rediscover joy in simple moments and detach from the societal pursuit of constant acceleration and growth. Consequently, awareness, presence and compassion as cultivated inner qualities can foster a more modest yet deeply fulfilling way of life. The recognition of the destructive impacts of current lifestyles, which can strengthen the intention to live more consciously and open pathways toward profound personal and societal transformation lies at the core of this.

The importance of target group–specific communication is also emphasized by Imke-Marie Badur. She stresses the need to address concrete problems directly in order to engage people with the value of inner sustainability. In the context of orientation programs, these problems often include loneliness, lack of career direction, lethargy, and lack of motivation. Badur particularly highlights uncertainty in a professional career context as a key

issue. In her daily work, she sees this as an opportunity to anchor inner sustainability more broadly. Many young people initially approach their programs with this specific challenge, but over the course of the program they discover that they gain far more than just career orientation. The focus soon shifts to self-awareness and relationships: participants learn to regulate their emotions, understand their nervous system, and practice forming healthy boundaries and connections. Through reflecting on personal and societal conditioning, they develop a new perspective on themselves. The motivation that emerges from this process is often powerful. Participants leave the program with a renewed sense of agency and purpose, expressing sentiments such as: “I am a creator of my life,” or “Now I understand how valuable and precious life is, what truly matters, and what is important to me.” The phrase “time for yourself” is seen as a powerful communicative tool by Badur. While the long-term goal is to integrate such development into formal education, examples from countries like Scandinavia show that even strong school systems benefit from additional spaces that support individual growth.

Rohrmoser highlights another way in which inner sustainability enriches participants' lives: through the experience of belonging to a group. The sense of connection and the narrative of togetherness that emerge in group settings offer emotional support and reduce feelings of isolation. She observes that personal stability is increasingly fragile, with individuals more easily thrown off balance. In her view, this perceived instability presents a key entry point for promoting inner sustainability, as people seek grounding and orientation for their role in the world in uncertain times. Orientation can – according to Rohrmoser – also be given by in-depth explanations of broader topics and contexts.

Clear communication and framing of inner sustainability

Accordingly, Liane Stephan emphasizes the opportunity inherent in clear communication and simple language. She states that the discourse on inner sustainability has yet to be effectively translated into accessible language for the public, such as readers of mainstream magazines. Consequently, the message remains largely confined to already convinced audiences rather than reaching a broader population. Progress is being made as

communicators increasingly refine their ability to present complex concepts in clear, simple terms that can be understood by a wider audience.

In the context of communication Imke-Marie Badur highlights that it is important to frame offers related to inner sustainability as psychological topics, not as esoteric-related offers. A down-to-earth attitude in her view is important for scaling inner development. Effective communication and framing of inner sustainability should emphasize personal connection and emotional openness and be in balance with knowledge transfer. Elisabeth Rohrmoser indicates that participants respond positively to a sense of vulnerability and direct interpersonal exchange of hosts, which fosters a qualitatively different and deeper form of engagement. By doing so, inner sustainability is conveyed not merely as abstract knowledge but as a lived, experiential practice grounded in meaningful social interaction.

Multipliers

The critical role of multipliers is another opportunity identified in the interviews, this is for example mentioned by Liane Stephan, as she highlights the ripple effect generated by training individuals who become active in the field of inner sustainability. Consequently, the Inner Green Deal as an organization trying to work holistically implements programs designed to empower these individuals to disseminate relevant topics within their communities, thereby fostering broader societal integration of inner sustainability. For some multipliers, tools such as resilience screenings serve as an entry point to engage participants and stimulate further interest. Initial training sessions raise awareness and thus enable the ripple effect to occur.

Stephan argues that systemic change at the societal level is likely to originate primarily from NGOs – which serve as multipliers – rather than formal organizations or political institutions. While competition based on branding still exists – a sign of the “old system” – , she anticipates a shift toward collaboration among initiatives, which would enhance their collective impact. Similar dynamics may arise within organizations, but only if increasing societal awareness leads consumers to demand higher standards. These changing expectations are seen as crucial drivers for systemic transformation.

Cooperation as a factor to successfully scale inner sustainability is mentioned by Elisabeth Rohrmoser as well, as Pioneers for Change see collaboration between already existing actors in this field as crucial.

Changing social narratives

Another significant aspect concerns the influence of prevailing social narratives. Concurrently, the concept of “Inner Development” is gaining traction within European Union discourse as it appears more frequently in official documents, as Liane Stephan states. She further emphasizes the importance of research in this context, highlighting the huge importance that building upon empirical findings has. According to Stephan, the availability of data, evidence, and facts positively influences societal acceptance and helps to scale the topic to a broader public, which then might lead to more engagement. She also emphasizes that growing individual awareness of sustainable consumption and climate change is key to scaling the concept of inner sustainability: According to her experience, more people recognize climate change, and as a consequence reconsider their consumption habits, creating pressure on companies to act beyond regulatory requirements. She notes that many employees’ experience climate anxiety and want to contribute but lack organizational support. This leads in her view to the conclusion, that grassroots initiatives within companies will drive more meaningful change than top-down approaches, as they are more likely to occur. Additionally, she observes a gradual shift in public attitudes – even among skeptics – underscoring the importance of education and visibility in fostering wider acceptance and action.

Recognizes the importance of fostering a positive societal attitude towards sustainability, the hypothesis of Stephan aligns with the perspective of Elisabeth Rohrmoser: Rather than dwelling on notions of collapse, which can lead to stagnation, she emphasizes that hope is essential in her work to inspire engagement with the concept of inner sustainability.

Support on a system-level

Support at the systemic level was another aspect mentioned that could help scale inner sustainability. Imke-Marie Badur would focus primarily on government funding in this regard. Programs on inner sustainability would

then be easier to roll out on a broad scale. Badur also proposes introducing a mandatory orientation period after school, during which school leavers can engage with inner processes. Liane Stephan also mentions the anchoring of inner sustainability in the education system: she questions why these topics are not yet established in universities and sees a great opportunity for transformation in the education system, as the young generation has a huge leverage to change the system.

Possibilities enabled by the online world

Elisabeth Rohrmoser highlights that online formats have proven highly effective in scaling inner sustainability and increasing accessibility. The long-lasting experience of Pioneers of change as an organization with structured online courses has allowed experimenting with course length and intensity to optimize engagement. As costs are eliminated by reducing expenses for example for accommodation, online courses offer financial advantages and thereby help to lower participation barriers. Scalability is largely driven – as Rohrmoser further emphasizes – by the dissemination of inspiration through various digital channels, including online summits, newsletters, and social media. Notably, the newsletter of Pioneers for Change shows greater subscriber engagement compared to social media platforms, indicating newsletters' effectiveness as a tool for outreach and community building. Imke-Marie Badur also uses the online world to make offers and networking opportunities more accessible. She has set up an information portal where offers relating to topics that are important for orientation periods are summarized and displayed.

7 Discussion

This chapter aims to give an overview of the results and discuss them to answer the overarching research question: *How can actors who engage with inner sustainability at a niche level in the DACH region (Germany, Austria, Switzerland) scale its impact as a meaningful driver for sustainable development?* First the results of the study are presented and summarized. Second the results are discussed within the background of the MLP. As a conclusion, some suggestions for actors are given for relevant leverages for

scaling the impact of inner sustainability and limitations of the methodology used in this thesis are shown.

7.1 Summary of the results

The results of this research combine the findings of the cluster analysis with insights from the interviews conducted. The cluster analysis revealed three distinct actor types, differentiated according to their degree of system orientation in the context of inner sustainability. The initial category, which is designated as "individually transformative actors," places significant emphasis on personal growth, self-awareness, and emotional well-being. These actors do not incorporate a comprehensive sustainability context into their work. While broader societal change is often part of their vision, it remains at an abstract level and is not operationalized within their programmatic work. The concept of inner sustainability is seldom articulated explicitly; rather, it is predominantly interpreted through a conventional environmental framework. The second category, system-aware personal development actors, explicitly link personal development to the idea of contributing to a sustainable or just society. Inner sustainability is named and integrated into their theory of change, though their offers remain centered on the individual sphere without requiring direct engagement beyond it. The third category, systemically-transformative actors, explicitly position inner development as a strategic lever for societal transformation. Their programs aim to equip changemakers, leaders, and other multipliers with the capacities needed to navigate and influence complex systems. Methodologies are conceptually embedded in frameworks related to system change.

Across all categories, actors share the underlying belief that inner work holds transformative potential for more sustainable societal outcomes even though the way in which this belief is framed and operationalized differs substantially, reflecting the diversity of narratives, methods, and target groups within the field. Looking at the degree of explicitness with which the actors communicate the link between inner sustainability and their aspiration to contribute to societal transformation to their target groups differ. They also vary in their approach to how such transformation should

be achieved, ranging from indirect pathways through individual wellbeing to direct engagement with systemic levels via multipliers, organizations, or broader societal narratives.

The interviews complemented this mapping by highlighting barriers and opportunities for scaling inner sustainability. The identified barriers include not only systemic obstacles such as the limitations of the formal education system, but also societal prejudices framing inner dimensions as “esoteric,” and superficial approaches to sustainability at political and organizational levels. Whenever inner sustainability is not clearly situated within existing departments, this further hinders integration and shows structural ambiguity within organizations as a limiting factor. Moreover, interviewees pointed to a lack of willingness for deep transformation in society, a preference for short, convenient formats over long-term processes, and individual tendencies to become absorbed in personal struggles as limiting factors as a limiting factor for scaling inner sustainability.

At the same time, several opportunities for scaling inner sustainability were identified. This includes clearly explaining how it improves people's lives, using language that's easy to understand, and making offers that directly address the specific challenges of the groups we're trying to reach. Multipliers have been identified as a key driver for wider dissemination. Changing social stories, growing policy interest, and including environmental sustainability in education systems were also considered important tools for achieving this goal. The internet can reach more people and make information more accessible when combined with other formats that encourage people to feel like they belong and like they're part of a community.

7.2 Reference to the MLP

Within the MLP framework, niches are small-scale, experimental spaces characterized by a high degree of innovation and often carried forward by pioneering actors (Geels 2002), for example by the actors analyzed in this study. The current socio-cultural and institutional regime is challenged by inner sustainability as a niche phenomenon in several ways. It confronts a outwarded understanding of sustainability, in which emphasis lies on

technological solutions and measurable outcomes while neglecting cultural, relational, and inner dimensions (Wamsler et al. 2021). This new niche of inner sustainability also questions economic systems that fail to embed mental health, self-reflection, and human well-being into their core functioning as well as education systems that overlook the cultivation of emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and resilience. In the case of inner sustainability, thematic areas identified by Buchebner and Stockinger (2021) such as inner maturity, overcoming internal resistance, self-efficacy, shadow work, potential development, identity crises, and confronting “Weltschmerz” mirror the characteristics of niche innovations, as do the Inner Development Goals (IDG 2025). These focus areas target deeply personal, introspective dimensions as they are – in contrary to the results shown in chapter 5 (the role of inner sustainability), that a holistic understanding is needed that include both sides of sustainable development to change the currently outer-sustainability-focused regime, these dimensions are not yet integrated into dominant sustainability discourses.

The macro level denotes – as already shown – the socio-technical landscape, encompassing broad external forces such as cultural values, economic systems, environmental change, and global events, which shape and influence the regime and niche dynamics (Geels 2002). In this case, escalating climate and social crises, growing frustration with purely technical sustainability approaches, the mental health crisis, the value-shifting among younger generations, and emerging social movements create potential openings for inner sustainability. These pressures can interact with regime weaknesses, such as rising burnout in workplaces or demands for education reform, to make niche solutions more attractive (Smith et al. 2010; Geels & Schot 2007). In the interviews, barriers both on landscape and regime level were repeatedly identified as obstacles to scaling inner sustainability. Regime-level structures such as the current educational system were mentioned by Imke-Marie Badur as incompatible with genuine personality development. Societal prejudices against inner dimensions, framing them as “esoteric” and irrelevant, also reflect entrenched cultural norms and narratives at the regime level. Badur identifies the potential for these prejudices to diminish gradually, for example, through the introduction

of academic programs integrating inner topics. However, she considers this progress to be too slow. As Liane Stephan has observed, the phenomenon of greenwashing and the absence of substantive sustainability regulations can be traced back to the inherent deficiencies within the institutional and policy frameworks of the prevailing regime. These frameworks are distinguished by a notable absence of clear and effective political directives, thereby establishing a conducive environment for greenwashing and the dissemination of superficial sustainability measures. A paucity of awareness regarding the pertinence of inner sustainability at the political and societal levels is indicative of the prevailing regime framings of sustainability, wherein inner development is acknowledged solely within specialized circles. The Human Resources and Learning and Development departments regard it as a matter of sustainability, while the departments responsible for sustainability consider it to be beyond the scope of their respective duties. This siloed organizational logic is indicative of regime-level institutional boundaries that impede the adoption of this innovative approach to understanding sustainable transformation at scale. Similarly, the ambiguous role of initiatives like Pioneers of Change reflects the niche's struggle to position itself within or adjacent to the regime. However, as Badur emphasizes, sustainability alone is not a sufficient selling point. The societal tendency toward short, convenient formats and avoidance of depth, as described by Badur, relates to prevailing socio-cultural trends at the landscape level that influence consumer and participant preferences. At the same time, the dynamic of people prioritizing quick wins and avoiding long-term processes is also reinforced by incentives on regime-level as these determine structures in education, business, and policy, which often reward efficiency and superficial engagement over depth. This leads to the creation of a resistance to the extended commitment required for personal transformation, which is the goal of inner sustainability. Another barrier mentioned was individuals who tend to become overly absorbed in personal difficulties, as described by Rohrmoser, shapes how participants engage with inner sustainability offerings. This has a limiting effect on the niche's ability to mobilize collective agencies and demonstrate societal-level

benefits, thereby affecting its capacity to have an influence on the regime level.

The opportunity to emphasize the personal benefits of inner sustainability primarily operates at the niche level. In this context, actors can attract others by connecting inner sustainability to tangible improvements in wellbeing. The development of clear, accessible, and non-esoteric communication facilitates niche actors in reaching audiences that have not yet been convinced. By making inner sustainability a practice that is based in psychology, relevant to society, and emotionally engaging, actors can make it more legitimate within regime institutions and public discourse. This change in thinking has been shown to help people fit into more formal situations, like schools, company training programs, and public health discussions. Multipliers have the capacity to expedite the dissemination process by generating ripple effects, thereby integrating niche principles into regime-level structures. When multipliers function within NGOs, companies, or educational systems, they constitute a direct pathway for niche innovations to influence regime practices and norms. The shifting public attitudes toward sustainability, the increased visibility of "Inner Development" in political and policy discourse, and the growing acknowledgment of climate-related mental health concerns are landscape-level trends that have the potential to apply pressure on the regime to adapt. These changes create opportunities for new ideas to become popular. By working with these new ideas, people involved in inner sustainability can show their work as an important and timely response to larger changes in society. Government funding, integration into formal education, and policy-level support represent interventions at the regime level that have the potential to institutionalize inner sustainability. Such systemic support frequently hinges on landscape-level factors, including, but not limited to, political will and generational shifts in value. However, the incorporation of intrinsic sustainability principles within academic institutions, educational facilities, and public programs would substantially augment the scope and credibility of such initiatives. To avoid stagnation where the unsustainable current system remains unchanged it is necessary to bring inner sustainability to a broader audience. The more people change their

mindsets and transform internally, the higher the chances for leverage to change a system from within. According to Ives et al. (2023), inner sustainability is about activating inner dimensions. This idea matches what Rohrmoser, Stephan, and Badur said in their interviews. The goal is to change how people think, feel, and act, as well as the stories and values that shape their lives. This will create the emotional and social foundation needed to bring about positive, widespread change (Bristow et al. 2024). This is only possible if people on individual level change and actively rethink, and thus a simple communication of inner sustainability is needed, as Stephan states in the interview and what's also brought forward in the concept of the three spheres of transformation (O'Brien et al 2023, Otero et al. 2025). This aligns with Sharma (2017) and Hochachka (2019), as they state that personal sustainability is more likely to be effective and enduring if people on an individual level choose for themselves to change because they see the positive effects the changes have on them and thus truly care about the transformation. To achieve this, target group specific communication is necessary as stated in the interviews. Focusing on multipliers and equipping them with relevant knowledge and tools is another relevant focus point mentioned in the interviews that actors can concentrate on, though this is a research field that's not yet explored well in the literature related to inner sustainability. These characteristics indicate that the reconfiguration pathway (Geels and Schot 2007) is the most likely: pioneering actors introduce inner sustainability practices into education, organizations, and communities, initially at local scales, before they are integrated more broadly into regime structures through gradual bottom-up diffusion. This interpretation is reinforced by Liane Stephan's interview statement, highlighting her view that inner sustainability will be brought into society primarily through grassroots initiatives and bottom-up engagement, rather than through abrupt systemic overhauls.

With regard to the role of actors, Reißig (2009) emphasizes that societal transformations can be significantly influenced and shaped by relevant actors operating at the niche level. Accordingly, transformation depends, among other factors, on whether actors are able to identify and actively shape the window of opportunity (Geels and Schot 2007). To what extent

this applies to actors of inner sustainability in the DACH region represents an intriguing avenue for further research, particularly in relation to the scaling potential of inner sustainability.

7.3 Limitations of the study

Methodologically, several limitations of this study must be acknowledged. The empirical basis rests on three in-depth interviews, which, while providing valuable insights, is insufficient for generating generalized conclusions; a larger sample size or more detailed examination of actors would be required to strengthen validity. Additionally, while the MLP is a useful tool for analyzing socio-technical transitions, it does not consider the geographical or cultural contexts in which these dynamics occur. The study's cluster analysis showed that there are different groups of actors in different parts of the DACH region. Inner sustainability is closely related to values, mindsets, and cultural stories. These cultural and geographical factors are important for understanding how special practices can become popular and influence the whole system. Additionally, while the type-formation of the actors was done according to the system change orientation of the different actors, more actors must be analyzed with more detail to give a valid baseline to understand better of how inner sustainability as a relatively new niche impacts the regime.

8 Conclusion and Outlook

Until now, the focus in sustainable development has been primarily on adapting to system feedback loops or combating the symptoms of environmental destruction and social injustice (Göpel 2016). As many researchers from different backgrounds such as geography, social sciences, psychology or environmental sciences state there must be a radical inner transformation and rethinking to successfully transform the outer world in a sustainable way (Reid and Grant 2024, Göpel 2016, Ley 2001, Sieben 2007). Changing how we as humans see the world also changes how we act in it and how we envision promising development paths and their governance (Göpel 2016, Meadows 1999). This study gave

insights into how this rethinking can be achieved by actors who are working in this field.

In light of the findings of this study, subsequent research endeavors may wish to delve deeper into the question of whether actors must be consciously aware that their work contributes to inner sustainability in order to generate a positive impact. A working hypothesis that is emerging from this research is that explicitly and repeatedly framing activities within the broader sustainability discourse may, in some cases, be counterproductive. By overemphasizing the abstract and collective dimensions of "sustainability" its personal resonance can be diminished, even though it would be essential for engaging individuals with this concept. To make it more accessible and appealing, integrating sustainability with concrete, relatable, individual-level experiences is helpful, as by doing so broader dissemination is facilitated. Investigating this dynamic in more detail could provide valuable insights into how new actors in the DACH region can strategically position themselves. This positioning would require striking a balance between articulating societal relevance and cultivating personal connection.

Furthermore, more research is needed in understanding the three defined categories of actors to better estimate the possibilities the different actors have in scaling inner sustainability and how the window of opportunity can be used by relevant actors. Furthermore, it would be interesting to compare players to determine which are best suited to initiate which types of change. Additionally, more research is needed to determine which internal sustainability topics are already being implemented and how successful they are in creating an actual impact. This could provide recommendations for new players looking to position themselves in this niche.

References

- Abson, D. J., Fischer, J., Leventon, J., Newig, J., Schomerus, T., Vilsmaier, U., von Wehrden, H., Abernethy, P., Ives, C. D., Jager, N. W., & Lang, D. J. (2017). Leverage points for sustainability transformation. *Ambio*, 46(1), 30–39.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-016-0800-y>.
- Ankrah, D., Bristow, J., Hires, D. and Henriksson, J.A. (2023) Inner Development Goals: from inner growth to outer change, Field Actions Science Reports, Special Issue 25, online available at: <http://journals.openedition.org/factsreports/7326>.
- Artmann, M. (2023) 'Human-nature resonance in times of social-ecological crisis - a relational account for sustainability transformation', *Ecosystems and people (Abingdon, England)*, 19(1). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/26395916.2023.2168760>.
- Bauknecht, D., Brohmann, B. & Grießhammer, R. (2015). Transformationsstrategien und Models of Change für nachhaltigen gesellschaftlichen Wandel: Gesellschaftlicher Wandel als Mehrebenenansatz. Umweltbundesamt. Available at: <http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/publikationen/gesellschaftlicher-wandel-als-mehrebenenansatz>.
- Bianchi, G., Pisiotis, U. and Cabrera Giraldez, M., GreenComp The European sustainability competence framework, Punie, Y. and Bacigalupo, M. editor(s), EUR 30955 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2022, ISBN 978-92-76-46485-3, doi:10.2760/13286, JRC128040.
- Bovarnick, A. and Legrand, T. (2022) *Beyond sustainability: Why a deeper transformation is needed to change food systems*. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) online accessible: <https://www.undp.org/foodsystems/blog/beyond-sustainability>

- Bristow, J., Bell, R., Wamsler, C., Björkman, T., Tickell, P., Kim, J., & Scharmer, O. (2024). *The System Within: Addressing the inner dimensions of sustainability and systems change*. (Deep-dive paper; No. 17). The Club of Rome: Earth4All. <https://www.clubofrome.org/publication/earth4all-bristow-bell/>
- Brunn, S. D. (2022). Geographers and sustainability: Five research challenges. *Geography and Sustainability*, 3(1), 68–73. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geosus.2022.03.003>.
- Cooper, K. J., & Gibson, R. B. (2022). A Novel Framework for Inner-Outer Sustainability Assessment. *Challenges (Basel)*, 13(2), 64. <https://doi.org/10.3390/challe13020064>.
- Dixson-Declève, S., Gaffney, O., Ghosh, J., Randers, J., Rockström, J., Stoknes, P. E., & Club of Rome. (2022). *Earth for all : a survival guide for humanity : a report to the Club of Rome (2022), fifty years after The limits of growth (1972)*. New Society Publishers.
- Frank, P., Fischer, D., & Wamsler, C. (2019). Mindfulness, Education, and the Sustainable Development Goals. In W. Leal Filho, A. M. Azul, L. Brandli, P. G. Özuyar, & T. Wall (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Quality Education* (Vol. 10, pp. 1–11). Cham: Springer. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-69902-8_105-1.
- Frank, P., Wagemann, J., Grund, J., & Parodi, O. (2024). Directing personal sustainability science toward subjective experience: conceptual, methodological, and normative cornerstones for a first-person inquiry into inner worlds. *Sustainability Science*, 19(2), 555–574. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-023-01442-w>
- Fuß, S. and Karbach, U. (2019): Grundlagen der Transkription. Eine praktische Einführung. 2. Überarbeitete Auflage, Opladen und Toronto: Verlag Barbara Budrich GmbH.
- Geels, F. (2002) Technological transitions as evolutionary reconfiguration processes: a multi-level perspective and a case-study. In: *Research Policy*: Jg. 31 (8) 1257–1274.

- Geels, F. and Kemp, R. (2012) The Multi-Level Perspective as a New Perspective for Studying Socio-Technical Transitions. In: Geels, F. (2012) *Automobility in Transition? A Socio-technical analysis of sustainable transport*. 1. publ. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Geels, F. and Schot, J. (2007) Typology of sociotechnical transition pathways. In: *Research Policy*: Jg. 36 (3) 399–417.
- Geels, F. and Schot, J. (2010) 'Part I The Dynamics of Transitions A: Socio-Technical Perspective', in Rotmans, J., Grin, J. and Schot, J (2010) *Transitions to Sustainable Development*. United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis Group.
- Geels, F.W. (2019) Socio-technical transitions to sustainability: a review of criticisms and elaborations of the Multi-Level Perspective, *Current opinion in environmental sustainability*, 39, pp. 187–201. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2019.06.009>.
- Göpel, M. (2016). *The great mindshift : how a new economic paradigm and sustainability transformations go hand in hand* (1st Edition 2016, Vol. 2). Wuppertal Institut. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-43766-8>.
- Gregory, D., & Bloomsbury. (2022). *Human geography : society, space and social science* (First edition). Macmillan.
- Hochachka, G. (2019). On matryoshkas and meaning-making: Understanding the plasticity of climate change. *Global Environmental Change*, 57, 101917. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2019.05.001>
- IDG (2021): Inner Development Goals Background, method and the IDG framework – edited and short version. Available online at https://drive.google.com/file/d/1nM6eyTc_cr9_kLJAWYrkHTShlhqU9fXD/.
- Inner Development Goals (IDG) (2025): Official Framework in different languages. Online available at [Framework – Inner Development Goals](#).

- IPBES (2022) Summary for policymakers of the methodological assessment of the diverse values and valuation of nature of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. Bonn. Available at <https://www.ipbes.net/the-values-assessment>.
- IPCC (2022): Mitigation of Climate Change. Contribution of Working Group III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [P.R. Shukla, J. Skea, R. Slade, A. Al Khourdajie, R. van Diemen, D. McCollum, M. Pathak, S. Some, P. Vyas, R. Fradera, M. Belkacemi, A. Hasija, G. Lisboa, S. Luz, J. Malley, (eds.)]. *Cambridge University Press*, Cambridge, UK and New York, NY, USA. doi: 10.1017/9781009157926
- Ivanova, E. and Rimanoczy, I. (2022) *Revolutionizing sustainability education : stories and tools of mindset transformation*. Abingdon, Oxon New York, NY: Routledge.
- Ives, C. D., Freeth, R., & Fischer, J. (2020). Inside-out sustainability: The neglect of inner worlds. *Ambio*, 49(1), 208–217. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-019-01187-w>
- Ives, C. D., Schöpke, N., Woiwode, C., & Wamsler, C. (2023). IMAGINE sustainability: integrated inner-outer transformation in research, education and practice. *Sustainability Science*, 18(6), 2777–2786. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-023-01368-3>.
- Ives, C.D., Freeth, R. and Fischer, J. (2020) 'Inside-out sustainability: The neglect of inner worlds', *Ambio*, 49(1), pp. 208–217. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-019-01187-w>.
- Kopfmüller, J., Luks, F. and Siebenhüner, B. (2007) '20 Jahre Brundtland-Bericht', *Ökologisches Wirtschaften - Fachzeitschrift*, 22(1). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.14512/ow.v22i1.495>.
- Kuckartz, U. (2018): Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse. Methoden, Praxis, Computerunterstützung. 4. Überarbeitete Auflage. Weinheim Basel: Beltz Juventa.

- Kuckartz, U. and Rädiker, S. (2023) *Qualitative content analysis : methods, practice and software*. 2nd edition. Los Angeles London New Delhi Singapore Washington DC Melbourne: SAGE.
- Leichenko, R. and O'Brien, K. (2024) *Climate and society : transforming the future*. Second edition. Cambridge, UK Hoboken, NJ: polity.
- Ley, W. (2001). Die ökologische dimension der psychoanalyse und das konzept der inneren nachhaltigkeit. *Forum der Psychoanalyse*, 17(1), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s004510100079>.
- Mayring, P. (2016): Einführung in die qualitative Sozialforschung. 6., neu ausgestattete, überarbeitete Auflage, Weinheim: Beltz Verlagsgruppe.
- Meadows, D., (1999) *Leverage points: Places to intervene in a system*. Hartland, VT: The Sustainability Institute.
- Moore, M.L., and M. Milkoreit. 2020. Imagination and transformations to sustainable and just futures. *Elementa: Science of the Anthropocene* 8: 081. <https://doi.org/10.1525/elementa.2020.081>.
- Moore, M.-L., Riddell, D., and Vocisano, D. (2015). Scaling Out, Scaling Up, Scaling Deep: Strategies of Non-profits in Advancing Systemic Social Innovation. *The Journal of Corporate Citizenship*, 2015(58), 67–84. DOI: [10.9774/GLEAF.4700.2015.ju.00009].
- O'Brien, K. (2018). Is the 1.5°C target possible? Exploring the three spheres of transformation. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 31, 153–160. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2018.04.010>.
- O'Brien, K., and Sygna, L. (2013) Responding to climate change: The three spheres of transformation. In *Proceedings of transformation in a changing climate*, 16–23. Oslo: University of Oslo.
- O'Brien, K., Carmona, R., Gram-Hanssen, I., Hochachka, G., Sygna, L., and Rosenberg, M. (2023). Fractal approaches to scaling transformations to sustainability. *Ambio*, 52(9), 1448–1461. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-023-01873-w>

- Otero, I., Keller, R., Deplazes-Zemp, A., and Reynard, E. (2025). Exploring the personal sphere of transformative change in researchers and stakeholders working on nature. *Ecosystems and People* (Abingdon, England), 21(1).
<https://doi.org/10.1080/26395916.2024.2436374>.
- Parodi, O., and Tamm, K. (2018). *Personal sustainability : exploring the far side of sustainable development*. Routledge.
- Parodi, O., Wamsler, C., Dusseldorp, M., Philipp, T., & Schmohl, T. (2023). Personal Sustainability. In *Handbook Transdisciplinary Learning* (p. 277). <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783839463475-029>.
- Powell, D. 2019. Climate breakdown: Think exponentially. New Economics Foundation. <https://neweconomics.org/2019/07/climate-breakdown-think-exponentially>. Accessed 25.07.2025.
- Ramirez, M. A., & Lizarazo, I. (2025). Geographic perspectives on sustainability: Towards a conceptual framework. *Environmental Development*, 53, 101121.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envdev.2024.101121>.
- Reid, C., & Grant, L. (2024). A call to action: Re-activating the latent human factor for achieving the UN SDGs – cultivating courageous partnerships and compassionate human systems. *Psychology and Psychotherapy*, 97(3), 408–424.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/papt.12526>.
- Reißig, R. (2009). Gesellschafts-Transformation im 21. Jahrhundert – Neuer Typ und neues Paradigma sozialen Wandels. Eine Zusammenfassung. In *Gesellschafts- Transformation im 21. Jahrhundert* (S. 195–200). VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-91859-4_6
- Rimanoczy, I. (2021) *The sustainability mindset principles : a guide to develop a mindset for a better world*. Abingdon, Oxon New York, NY: Routledge.

- Ritz, A.A. and Rimanoczy, I. (2021) *Sustainability mindset and transformative leadership : a multidisciplinary perspective*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rockström, J., Klum, M. and Miller, P. (2015) *Big world, small planet : abundance within planetary boundaries*. New Haven ; London : Yale University Press.
- Schut, M., C. Leeuwis, and G. Thiele. 2020. Science of scaling: Understanding and guiding the scaling of innovation for societal outcomes. *Agricultural Systems* 184: 102908.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.agsy.2020.102908>.
- Scown, M. W. (2020). The Sustainable Development Goals need geoscience. *Nature Geoscience*, 13(11), 714–715.
<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41561-020-00652-6>.
- Sharma, M. (2017). *Radical transformational leadership: Strategic action for change agents*. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books.
- Sieben, D. (2007). Die innere Dimension der Nachhaltigkeit. *Ökologisches Wirtschaften - Fachzeitschrift*, 22(1).
<https://doi.org/10.14512/oew.v22i1.499>.
- Smith, A., Voß, J.-P. and Grin, J. (2010) Innovation studies and sustainability transitions: The allure of the multi-level perspective and its challenges , *Research policy*, 39(4), pp. 435–448.
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2010.01.023>.
- Stapley, E., O’Keeffe, S. and Midgley, N. (2021) *Essentials of ideal-type analysis : a qualitative approach to constructing typologies*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Sterner, T. *et al.* (2019) ‘Policy design for the Anthropocene’, *Nature sustainability*, 2(1), pp. 14–21. Available at:
<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-018-0194-x>.
- Stockinger, S. and Buchebner, J. (2024): *Die Kunst des Wandels. Sechs innere Schlüsselkompetenzen für zukunftsfähige Menschen und Organisationen*. Kohlhammer Sachbuch.

- Stockl, A. F., Moscovici, D., Tischler, S., Eitle, M. W., & Dolezal, C. (2024). Consumer Knowledge and Preferences for Organic and Sustainably Certified Wines: Lessons from the DACH Region – Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. *Sustainability*, 16(11), 4464. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su16114464>.
- United Nations (2023): Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General, Global Sustainable Development Report 2023: Times of crisis, times of change: Science for accelerating transformations to sustainable development, New York.
- United Nations (UN) (2015): A/RES/70/1 - Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Available online at: <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/70/1>.
- Wamsler, C. (2018) 'Mind the gap: The role of mindfulness in adapting to increasing risk and climate change', *Sustainability science*, 13(4), pp. 1121–1135. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-017-0524-3>.
- Wamsler, C. (2019). Contemplative Sustainable Futures: The Role of Individual Inner Dimensions and Transformation in Sustainability Research and Education. In: Leal Filho, W., Consorte McCrea, A. (eds) *Sustainability and the Humanities*. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-95336-6_20.
- Wamsler, C., Hertog, I.M. and Di Paola, L. (2022) 'Education for sustainability: Sourcing inner qualities and capacities for transformation', in *Revolutionizing Sustainability Education*. 1st edn. Routledge, pp. 49–62. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003229735-6>.
- Wamsler, C., Osberg, G., Osika, W., Herndersson, H., & Mundaca, L. (2021). Linking internal and external transformation for sustainability and climate action: Towards a new research and policy agenda. *Global Environmental Change*, 71, 102373. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2021.102373>

Wasioleski, D.M. and Weber, J. (2020) *Sustainability*. First edition.
Bingley, UK : Emerald Publishing.

Wilber, P. and Petersen, K. (2007). *Integrale Spiritualität : spirituelle
Intelligenz rettet die Welt*. Kösel.

Wissenschaftlicher Beirat der Bundesregierung (WGBU) (2011) Welt im
Wandel. Gesellschaftsvertrag für eine Große Transformation.

Woiwode, C., Schäpke, N., Bina, O., Veciana, S., Kunze, I., Parodi, O.,
Schweizer-Ries, P., & Wamsler, C. (2021). Inner transformation to
sustainability as a deep leverage point: fostering new avenues for
change through dialogue and reflection. *Sustainability Science*,
16(3), 841–858. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-020-00882-y>.

9 Appendix

9.1 Guiding questions for Interviews

- Inwiefern versteht ihr eure Arbeit als Beitrag zu einer nachhaltigen Transformation?
- Wer ist eure Zielgruppe und mit welchen inneren Herausforderungen oder Bedürfnissen kommt sie zu euch?
- Was hat sich in der Kommunikation und im Format eurer Angebote bewährt – und was weniger?
- Welche Chancen seht ihr, um innere Nachhaltigkeit künftig breiter zu verankern oder zu „skalieren“?
- Welche Barrieren oder Herausforderungen erlebt ihr aktuell dabei?

9.2 Interview Inner Green Deal

18.07.2025 09:00

Interviewpartnerin: Liane Stephan

Clara Mehringer: Bitte stell Dich und deine Rolle bei Inner Green Deal einmal vor!

Liane Stephan: Ich bin die CEO und Gründerin von Inner Green Deal, den ich zusammen mit einem Geschäftspartner, Jeroen, gegründet habe. Wir sind beide Direktoren und leiten die ganze Initiative gemeinsam. Entstanden ist das Ganze, weil ich seit 2009 eine große internationale Organisation namens Awaris leite, die Mindfulness- und Resilience-Trainings in globalen Unternehmen anbietet. Dabei sind wir international aufgestellt und machen viel Forschung. Ich bin schon immer sehr mit der Natur verbunden und habe mich schon lange mit der Klimakrise beschäftigt – lange bevor das Thema in den Medien war oder der EU Green Deal entwickelt wurde. Für mich war klar: Der EU Green Deal ist zwar schön und wichtig, aber er setzt nur auf äußere Veränderungen. Solange wir nicht unsere innere Welt verändern – also wie wir mit Herausforderungen und unterschiedlichen Meinungen umgehen und dabei offen und einladend bleiben – wird sich nichts Grundlegendes ändern. Sonst reparieren wir nur das System mit

Elektroautos, fahren aber weiter so, wie bisher. Das ist kein echter Systemwandel, sondern eher eine Verfestigung des Alten. Dann habe ich Jeroen getroffen, wir hatten eine ähnliche Sicht auf die Klimakrise. Und als der EU Green Deal entstand, haben wir gedacht: Dann machen wir eben den Inner Green Deal. Unsere Aufgabe ist jetzt, die Organisation Inner Green Deal nach der Startphase stabil und erwachsen zu machen – aber eben auf eine neue Art, die nicht das alte System bedient, sondern eher auf dem Prinzip eines Ökosystems basiert. Wir haben zwar noch kein festes Kernteam, aber einige Leute arbeiten mit uns zusammen oder unterstützen uns.

Clara Mehringer: Spannend wie ihr das macht. Da würde mich direkt noch interessieren wie tragen sich die beiden Unternehmen finanziell?

Liane Stephan: Awaris ist ein klassisches Beratungsunternehmen, das seine Einnahmen hauptsächlich von großen Unternehmen für die angebotenen Trainings erhält. Der Inner Green Deal lebt momentan vor allem von Fördermitteln. Wir haben eine Stiftung gefunden, die Inner Development im Bereich Nachhaltigkeit fördert und uns seit letztem Jahr sponsert. Außerdem verdienen wir etwas Geld über EU-Programme, die wir durchführen, wie Nature Walks und andere Inner Development Angebote. Insgesamt sind wir aber noch klar auf Förderungen angewiesen, weil wir gerade ein neues Finanzmodell aufbauen, das aber noch nicht fertig ist. Die ersten fünf Jahre haben wir im alten Finanzsystem gearbeitet, weil wir fanden, dass es keinen Sinn macht, von Anfang an ein komplett neues Modell zu starten. Wir wollten erst einen Namen aufbauen, Forschung betreiben und zeigen, dass Inner Development wirklich sinnvoll ist. Wenn das geschafft ist, planen wir auszusteigen aus dem herkömmlichen System und ein Role Model für Systemwandel zu sein: Wir wollen das Ego loslassen, alles transparent machen, unsere Programme offen zugänglich geben und so weiter.

Clara Mehringer: Du hast ja gerade schon angestoßen, welchen Beitrag ihr zur Nachhaltigkeitstransformation leistet. Wie verstehst du deine Arbeit beziehungsweise eure Arbeit und den Impact vom Inner Green Deal als Beitrag zu einer nachhaltigeren Welt?

Liane Stephan: Für mich ist ganz klar, dass unser Beitrag darin liegt, Menschen wieder mit sich selbst, anderen und der Natur zu verbinden. Unser Change-Modell basiert genau auf diesem Dreiklang. Wenn wir uns als Teil der Natur sehen und wieder in Verbundenheit mit uns selbst, anderen und der Natur sind, können wir diese nicht mehr ausbeuten. Wenn jemand 85 Stunden die Woche vor dem Bildschirm sitzt, bedeutet das, dass die ständige Beschäftigung die mentalen Kapazitäten so erschöpft, dass diese Person gar nicht mehr wahrnehmen kann, wie sie in der Welt agiert. Das alte System erzeugt also ermüdete Menschen, und ermüdete Menschen können keinen Systemwandel vorantreiben, weil ihnen die Energie fehlt. Deshalb hilft mir ein hohes Bewusstsein für die innere Welt, mich so zu regulieren, dass ich wirklich zusammenarbeiten kann und die Muster erkenne, in denen ich und das System gefangen sind. Ohne diesen inneren Beobachter reagiere ich nur gestresst und greife auf Bekanntes zurück – das hält uns im Konsum fest. Das hat großen Einfluss darauf, wie wir uns im System verhalten. Nachhaltigkeit bedeutet ja, mit den Ressourcen auszukommen, die die Welt allen zur Verfügung stellt. Wenn ich Mitgefühl für andere entwickelt habe, denke ich nicht mehr: „Die Ressourcen sind knapp, dann schalte ich andere einfach aus.“ Solange wir in Konkurrenzdenken, Wachstum um jeden Preis und der Vorstellung, die Natur sei unendlich, denken, kommen wir nicht zu nachhaltigem Wirtschaften oder Miteinander. Darum ist der Blick nach innen und das Trainieren eines hohen Bewusstseins für mich zentral, um in Nachhaltigkeit erfolgreich zu sein. Ein weiterer wichtiger Punkt ist unsere sozialen Narrative, also die kulturellen Geschichten wie „höher, weiter, schneller, schöner“, Botox, bestimmte Schönheitsideale – all das nehmen wir unkritisch auf, weil wir erschöpft sind und Zugehörigkeit spüren wollen. Mit mehr Bewusstsein fange ich an, diese Narrative zu hinterfragen und lasse mich nicht mehr so leicht davon verführen.

Clara Mehringer: Das hat dann auch großen Einfluss darauf, wie eine Gesellschaft insgesamt denkt und handelt. Danke, super spannend! Du hast schon einige wichtige Themen angesprochen, wie Zugehörigkeit und Überarbeitung. Was ist denn eure Hauptzielgruppe, und mit welchen

inneren Herausforderungen oder Bedürfnissen kommen diese Menschen zu euch?

Liane Stephan: Wir haben sehr unterschiedliche Zielgruppen, weil wir international arbeiten. Grob gesagt arbeiten wir mit NGOs, mit großen Systemorganisationen, viel mit der EU-Kommission und deren Führungskräften. Auch mit der UN, speziell mit Kofsa, die sich auf Agrarpolitik und Agrarsysteme konzentrieren, für die wir Programme entwickeln und durchführen. Außerdem arbeiten wir mit Organisationen wie dem European Climate Pact oder der UNFCCC zusammen – also sehr großen NGOs und Systemorganisationen. Daneben arbeiten wir auch mit Einzelpersonen, zum Beispiel in offenen Programmen, zu denen Changemaker oder Facilitators kommen. Die geben das Gelernte dann an ihre Communities weiter, damit der Ripple-Effekt größer wird. Manche dieser Teilnehmenden setzen wir auch gezielt in den Ländern ein, in denen wir NGOs unterstützen.

Clara Mehringer: Was hat sich da in der Kommunikation oder auch in dem Format von Euren Angeboten bewährt? Wie kommt ihr an die Kunden oder an die Zielgruppe ran?

Liane Stephan: Die Kunden kommen auf unterschiedliche Weise zu uns, das lässt sich nicht genau festmachen. Wir haben irgendwann ein Funding bekommen, um NGO-Programme anbieten zu können, also mussten wir NGOs finden. Inner Development ist in der Welt der Umwelt- und Klimaschutz-NGOs noch relativ neu, auch wenn die Mitarbeitenden oft erschöpft sind und es Budgetkürzungen gibt. Trotzdem wird Inner Development nicht überall gut angenommen. Oft müssen wir den Stein immer wieder ins Rollen bringen, erklären und gute Bilder schaffen. Manchmal ist ein kleiner Türöffner ein Resilience-Screening, um die Resilienz in der Organisation zu messen, oder ein einstündiger Vortrag, der die Relevanz verdeutlicht. Bei der UN oder Kofsa, die sich ohnehin schon mit Inner Development beschäftigen, war das einfacher. In der EU versteht man das auch recht schnell, aber dort gibt es andere Regularien, die es schwierig machen, offen darüber zu sprechen – zum Beispiel, dass Leute Nature Walks machen. Das wird zwar gemacht, aber man spricht nicht offen

darüber. Wir haben am Anfang auch versucht, in Konzerne reinzukommen, aber da wird Nachhaltigkeit oft ganz anders verstanden. Wenn wir über Inner Development sprechen, verweisen sie uns zu Learning & Development oder HR. Diese wiederum sagen, dass für Nachhaltigkeit das Sustainability-Department zuständig ist, aber Inner Development fällt da nicht in deren Zuständigkeitsbereich. Das zeigt, dass Unternehmen, auch mittelständische, oft noch sehr silohaft denken. Deshalb ist es schwer, diese Hürde zu überwinden. Darum arbeiten wir viel mit Research und eigenen Screenings, um kleine Türöffner zu schaffen – etwas, das wie eine gute wissenschaftliche Bewertung wirkt und auf dem man langsam aufbauen kann. Das alte System versteht noch nicht, warum Inner Development gebraucht wird. Es wächst das Verständnis, aber wir sind noch Lichtjahre davon entfernt, dass es wirklich breit akzeptiert ist.

Clara Mehringer: Welche Punkte siehst du, an denen die Chance groß ist, dass das alte System versteht, dass es diese neuen Ansätze braucht? Welche Türöffner oder Themen könnten dabei helfen?

Liane Stephan: Also auf verschiedenen Ebenen. Ich glaube, der Druck wächst. Ich höre immer mehr Menschen sagen: „Vielleicht gibt es doch einen Klimawandel.“ Das Bewusstsein in der Bevölkerung wird größer, und wenn das so ist, dann überlegt sich die Bevölkerung, welche Produkte sie kaufen. Wenn dieses Bewusstsein steigt, bekommen Unternehmen Druck – sie müssen mehr tun und anders handeln. Es reicht nicht mehr, nur die Millionen Seiten der Nachhaltigkeitsregularien auszufüllen, das reicht einfach nicht. Das ist das eine. Denn die Bevölkerung sitzt ja auch als Einzelpersonen in den Unternehmen, und da erlebe ich, dass viele Leute Climate Anxiety haben, die eigentlich unbedingt etwas tun wollen, aber das Unternehmen hat keine Plattform geschaffen, um das zu ermöglichen. Meine Hypothese ist, dass die grassroot initiatives in den Unternehmen langfristig mehr bewirken werden als bisher. Ein Top-Down-Verständnis wird es noch lange nicht geben, aber die grassroot initiatives können sehr viel bewegen. Auf gesellschaftlicher Ebene glaube ich, dass der Systemwechsel nicht von Organisationen oder Politik kommt, sondern von NGOs. Wenn die NGOs und die vielen kleinen Initiativen, die gerade laufen,

verstehen – und es wird der Punkt kommen, an dem alle das verstehen –, auch wenn es viel Konkurrenz gibt, wer das beste Branding hat oder die beste Webseite, was auch viel im alten System läuft, dann wird der Punkt kommen, an dem diese Initiativen erkennen, dass sie zusammenarbeiten müssen und es nicht mehr getrennt schaffen. Dann wird das einen großen Impact haben. Das wird bei Organisationen ähnlich sein, aber nur, wenn die Gesellschaft das sieht, wenn sich der Konsum verändert und Kunden und Konsumenten höhere Ansprüche an Organisationen stellen. Dann sehe ich eine große Chance für Veränderung. Aber momentan glaube ich, dass sie erst mal so weitermachen wie bisher mit den üblichen Regularien und mit Greenwashing, das gerade so möglich ist, weil es keine klare, wirkungsvolle politische Ansage gibt. Gleichzeitig sehe ich, dass Bewegungen wie B Corps oder die Gemeinwohl-Ökonomie wachsen und immer mehr Unternehmen mitmachen. Aber das sind vor allem KMUs. Bei den großen Konzernen sehe ich das überhaupt nicht.

Clara Mehringer: Danke. Du hast jetzt, wie ich dich verstanden habe, den Fokus auf die äußere Nachhaltigkeitstransformation gelegt. Wenn du das Ganze auf die Ebene der inneren Entwicklung, der inneren Nachhaltigkeit überträgst, wo siehst du da Chancen, das breiter in der Bevölkerung, bei einzelnen Menschen und auch in Organisationen zu verankern? Und wie kann man das so kommunizieren, dass sich mehr Leute dafür interessieren? Wo sind da Angriffspunkte, um Leute dazu zu bringen, sich mit diesem Thema auseinanderzusetzen?

Liane Stephan: Also ich glaube, das eine ist, dass es zum Teil schon passiert. Ich kenne zum Beispiel Menschen, von denen ich denke, sie haben mit Nachhaltigkeit eigentlich nichts zu tun, aber sie fangen langsam an umzudenken. Zum Beispiel konsumieren sie außen anders und sagen nicht mehr „Den Klimawandel gibt es gar nicht“, sondern sagen, da könnte schon etwas dran sein. Sie fangen an, mir zuzuhören, wenn ich etwas sage, und drehen sich nicht sofort weg und sagen „Quatsch“. Das ist vor allem im privaten Umfeld so. Ich glaube, es braucht viel Aufklärung und Sichtbarkeit. Das heißt, es braucht zuerst viel Forschung, denn durch Forschung schafft man es, dass das Gehirn nicht in Panik gerät, wenn es von Inner Development hört. Stattdessen denkt es: „Ah ja, da gibt es Zahlen, Fakten,

Beweise, das hat einen positiven Einfluss.“ Denn ich habe dadurch ein besseres Leben. Wenn ich dadurch kein besseres Leben hätte, warum sollte ich es dann machen? So denkt der Mensch zunächst. Er denkt nicht: „Wenn wir alle ein besseres Leben haben, dann habe ich auch ein besseres Leben.“ Sondern zuerst steht das Ego im Vordergrund. Deshalb braucht es aus meiner Sicht Forschung, und die wird auf dieser Ebene noch viel zu wenig gefördert. Das gibt es auch insgesamt viel zu wenig. Das andere ist die Arbeit, die wir machen, ähnlich wie viele andere. Wir skalieren und befähigen Menschen, das in ihre Communities zu tragen. Das können Facilitators sein, Bürgermeister oder alle möglichen Menschen im öffentlichen Leben, die einen Eindruck davon bekommen und Werkzeuge an die Hand bekommen, um innere Qualitäten in ihren nächsten Meetings oder Projekten wirklich umzusetzen. Ich glaube, das ist ein sehr wichtiger Ansatz, der diesen Ripple-Effekt immer weiter ausbreitet. Wir denken dabei nicht, dass wir als Initiativen etwas anbieten müssen, wofür wir Geld bekommen, sondern wir bieten etwas an, das andere in ihre Communities tragen können. Diese bringen es dann wiederum über ihre Community-Mitglieder in deren Familien und so weiter – also eine Art systemisches Denken. Außerdem passiert zumindest schon ein bisschen, dass in der Europäischen Union das Wort Inner Development schon öfter in Papieren auftaucht. Wir arbeiten stark daran, dass das noch klarer wird. Ursula von der Leyen hat das Wort ja schon mal verwendet und wir versuchen, dass sie es noch öfter benutzt, damit dieses Narrativ sich etabliert. Ich glaube, dann kommt es langsam in die Köpfe. Es gibt natürlich auch Artikel. Es gibt schon einige, wenn auch nicht viele, Forschungsartikel. Aber das wird noch nicht in eine Sprache heruntergebrochen, die dein Nachbar versteht – zum Beispiel ein 50-jähriger, der mal eine Zeitschrift aufschlägt und genau da einen Artikel findet. Stattdessen bleibt es relativ in der Bubble, die sowieso schon überzeugt ist, anstatt es auch außerhalb dieser Bubble zu verbreiten. Das finde ich total wichtig. Das nächste Level bist du. Warum ist das Thema eigentlich noch nicht in den Studiengängen? Wenn es gefördert oder kostenlos in die Studiengänge integriert werden kann – wirklich mit dem Satz: „Das ist die Generation, die noch viel verändern wird. Nicht ich, sondern sie.“ – dann ist die Frage: Wie bringen wir das an die Universitäten?

Wie erreichen wir, dass Studierende sehen: Nachhaltigkeit betrifft nicht nur die äußere Welt, sondern auch das Innere?

Clara Mehringer: Da hätte ich jetzt vielleicht noch eine Frage, die ich mir gar nicht aufgeschrieben hatte, die aber gerade sehr gut passt. Weil genau das war mein Versuch – ich habe ein vierwöchiges Workshop-Programm entwickelt und wir haben das auch durchgeführt. Aber ich hatte richtig Schwierigkeiten, Leute dafür zu begeistern. Also überhaupt erst mal Interesse zu wecken, dass Leute sagen: „Ah, das klingt spannend, da würde ich mitmachen.“ Auch viele meiner Kommiliton*innen haben eher sowas gesagt wie: „Das klingt irgendwie esoterisch“, oder „Das ist mir zu spirituell“, oder „So verändert sich die Welt doch nicht.“ Was würdest du solchen Argumenten entgegen? Also was wären für dich Gründe, warum sich zum Beispiel eine Studentin aus meinem Studiengang genau für sowas interessieren sollte?

Liane Stephan: Also ich würde erst mal eine Frage stellen und sagen: „Wow, interessant, dass du das so siehst. Was heißt denn Esoterik für dich?“ Ich würde wirklich neugierig sein, offen und einladend. Und dann vielleicht sowas sagen wie: „Hast du schon mal richtig Stress gehabt?“ – da sagen die meisten natürlich ja. Gerade die Studierenden, die ich kenne, haben oft richtig viel Stress und Druck. Dann würde ich fragen: „Wie kreativ bist du, wenn du so richtig gestresst bist?“ Die meisten sagen dann: „Na ja, ein bisschen Druck geht schon, aber wenn's zu viel wird, dann bin ich nicht mehr kreativ.“ Und dann: „Wie sehr kann sich die Welt verändern, wenn wir unser kreatives Potenzial – auch im Bereich Nachhaltigkeit – gar nicht entfalten können?“ Und genau darum geht's in dem Kurs. Wenn man's ganz einfach sagen will, geht es darum, dass wir lernen, uns selbst so zu regulieren, dass wir in einem Zustand sind, in dem Kreativität möglich ist. In dem wir gut zusammenarbeiten können. In dem wir überhaupt Muster erkennen – und das ist ja ein zentraler Teil von Nachhaltigkeit. Mustererkennung. Und das ist letztlich auch dein Job als Sustainability-Studentin: Muster erkennen. Nachhaltigkeit ist super viel Mustererkennung. Man könnte das jetzt auch neurophysiologisch oder neurowissenschaftlich erklären, aber ich würde nie einfach sagen: „Ich biete einen Kurs zu Inner Development an.“ Sondern eher: „Ich biete einen Kurs, der dich befähigt,

Nachhaltigkeit kreativ, wirksam und innovativ zu gestalten.“ Und dafür brauchst du halt einen bestimmten Geisteszustand – und den haben wir nicht, wenn wir im alten Systemmodus denken.

Clara Mehringer: und wie kommt man zu diesem neuen Denkmuster überhaupt hin? Also man braucht ja auch eine Methode, um da überhaupt erst mal reinzukommen?

Liane Stephan: Es gibt ja nicht die eine Methode, aber ein wichtiger Weg ist auf jeden Fall, das eigene Bewusstsein zu erhöhen. Und das kann auf ganz unterschiedliche Arten passieren – durch bestimmte Praktiken, durch Mitgefühl, durch die Auseinandersetzung mit den eigenen Denkmustern. Da gibt es unzählige Übungen, mit denen man lernen kann, ein höheres Bewusstsein zu entwickeln – und genau das braucht es, damit Nachhaltigkeit auch im Außen anders gelebt und umgesetzt werden kann. Weil: Wer entwickelt denn die Technologien? Das sind ja wir mit unserem Denken. Und wenn mein Geist kein langfristiges Denken hat, kein Systemdenken, keine innere Entwicklung durchlaufen hat, dann treffe ich halt auch technologische Entscheidungen, die nur kurzfristig gedacht sind – die vielleicht ein akutes Problem lösen, aber nicht nachhaltig wirken. Und dieses Bewusstsein kann man eben auf vielen Wegen trainieren – mit Methoden aus der Psychologie, aus indigenen Traditionen, aus dem Buddhismus, aus der Wissenschaft. Da gibt es tausende Möglichkeiten. Wie man das dann zusammenstellt, hängt vom Kontext und vom Flow ab – aber am Ende ist es ein Training. Es ist nicht so, dass man einmal irgendwo hinget, eine Erkenntnis hat und dann ist alles gut. Sondern es braucht wirklich Übung und Wiederholung – und idealerweise nimmt man daraus etwas mit, das man selbstständig weiter praktizieren kann.

Clara Mehringer: Jetzt hab ich noch eine letzte Frage: Du hast vorhin gesagt, dass innere Nachhaltigkeit – oder überhaupt die ganze Auseinandersetzung mit dem Thema – auch dazu führt, dass man ein besseres Leben führt, dass man sein eigenes Leben positiver gestalten kann. Wie sieht das denn konkret aus?

Liane Stephan: Ja, stimmt – „besser“ ist eigentlich schon wieder ein Urteil. Darum geht's gar nicht. Es geht eher darum, dass wir als Menschen

eigentlich eine bestimmte ursprüngliche Geschwindigkeit haben, ein anderes Gefühl für Verbindung – wenn man zum Beispiel an indigene Völker denkt: Die haben im Einklang mit der Natur gelebt, mit den Zyklen. Und dann kam irgendwann die Uhr – und wir sind aus diesen natürlichen Zyklen rausgefallen. Und heute sind wir völlig draußen. Unser Körper produziert teilweise nicht mal mehr Melatonin, weil wir die ganze Zeit vor Bildschirmen hängen. Viele Menschen können nicht mehr richtig schlafen. Und das macht uns unglücklich. Weil wir in einer Gesellschaft leben, in der es immer ums Nächste geht: Wenn ich das erreicht habe, dann muss ich das Nächste machen, und dann das Nächste, und dann wieder was Neues. Wir sind völlig davon entfernt, was wir eigentlich sind: soziale Wesen. Wir wollen dazugehören. Wir wollen gesehen werden. Wir wollen ein gewisses Maß an Nähe, Verbindung, Nahrung – im weiten Sinn – und natürlich, dass unsere Grundbedürfnisse erfüllt sind. Aber wir haben uns da in so eine komische Situation manövriert, dass wir oft gar nicht mehr wissen, was wir wirklich wollen. Weil wir nur noch funktionieren, ständig rennen, ständig mehr Geld verdienen müssen, weil wir so viele Verpflichtungen haben. Und wenn man sich mal Research anschaut: In westlichen Gesellschaften ist ein Großteil der Menschen unglücklich. Und gleichzeitig gibt's Bevölkerungsgruppen, die materiell wenig haben – und oft trotzdem glücklicher sind. Wie kommt das? Das liegt natürlich nicht nur an Nachhaltigkeitsthemen, aber auch. Diese Menschen leben oft im Miteinander, im Kontakt. Und wenn wir innere Qualitäten wie Mitgefühl entwickeln – also wirklich die Fähigkeit, mich in andere hineinzusetzen, offen zu sein, Verbindung zu spüren – dann kann daraus ganz viel Freude entstehen. Vor allem, wenn ich nicht mehr ständig denke, ich muss so und so aussehen, so und so sein, mich ständig optimieren. Das ist alles Druck. Wenn ich aber einfach ich sein darf, so wie ich bin – und spüre, ich bin genau richtig so, ich kann einen wertvollen Beitrag leisten – dann entspannt sich was. Und das heißt nicht, dass man faul wird. Es geht nicht darum, nichts mehr zu tun. Klar darf ich auch mal diszipliniert sein und was lernen. Aber dieser ständige Hype von schneller, höher, weiter – den brauche ich dann nicht mehr. Und dann finde ich langsam zu mir zurück. Und auch zur Freude. Dann sehe ich plötzlich den Sonnenuntergang und denke: Wow –

den habe ich die letzten zehn Jahre gar nicht bemerkt. Oder ich sehe eine Blume und merke: Krass, die war letztes Jahr auch schon da – wie schön. Ich sehe die Welt mit anderen Augen. Und dadurch kann ich auch mich selbst wieder als wertvoll wahrnehmen. Und das entspannt. Viele Menschen, die ich kenne, haben so wenig Selbstwert und rennen ständig etwas hinterher: ein größeres Haus, ein neues Auto, noch mehr – selbst junge Leute. Ich denke mir manchmal: Ihr kauft euch ein Haus für eine Million, habt dann ewig Schulden und müsst euer ganzes Leben dafür ackern. Warum nehmt ihr nicht das Geld und macht was Sinnstiftendes? Jede*r soll natürlich machen, was sie oder er will. Aber ich glaube wirklich: Wenn wir wieder mehr innere Qualitäten und Bewusstsein kultivieren, dann finden wir zu einem genügsameren, aber gleichzeitig glücklicheren Leben zurück. Wir entdecken wieder, was wir wirklich brauchen – und was nicht. Denn das haben wir total verlernt. Und wenn ich dann auch noch in der Tiefe verstehe, dass das, was wir tun, gerade dazu führt, dass wir uns selbst auslöschen – wenn ich das wirklich begreife – dann fange ich an, den Tag wieder bewusst zu genießen. Und dann verändert sich was. Wir arbeiten da dran, auch wenn wir bisher vor allem Ablehnung bekommen haben. Aber wir werden das schaffen, ganz sicher. Weißt du, gerade von so „typischen“ Magazinen wie Brigitte oder Freundin, oder auch von intellektuellen Medien wie dem Spiegel, kommt oft erst mal Widerstand. Aber genau da müssen wir dranbleiben. Genau, genau, die sind da noch nicht ganz, aber sie kommen da hin. Und wir üben uns immer mehr darin, das Ganze so zu erklären, dass es wirklich alle verstehen können – also diese komplexen Themen einfach und klar rüberzubringen.

Clara Mehringer: Hast du noch irgendwas, das dir auf dem Herzen liegt und das du gerne noch loswerden möchtest?

Liane Stephan: Ja, ich glaube, was mir noch wichtig ist: Innere Entwicklung allein ist nicht die Lösung. Innen und Außen sind nicht trennbar. Genauso braucht es auch eine starke Außenentwicklung, die angestoßen werden muss – aber die passiert oft nicht durch die Politik. Und wenn die Außenentwicklung da ist, kann sie auch das Innen verändern. Der Weg geht also nicht nur von innen nach außen. Aber ehrlich gesagt kenne ich bisher keinen Politiker, der es schafft, im Außen so glaubwürdig zu sprechen und

so viele gute Entscheidungen zu treffen, dass die Menschen wirklich im Rahmen dessen ihr Verhalten verändern. Wenn du mal jemanden kennenlernst, sag mir gern Bescheid. Deshalb sehe ich im Moment vor allem den Weg von innen nach außen.

Clara Mehringer: Bin gespannt! Und ich hab richtig viel von dem, was du gesagt hast, mitgenommen, da will ich auf jeden Fall nochmal genauer draufschauen. Super spannend, danke dir! Ganz liebe Grüße und einen schönen Tag!

Liane Stephan: Danke dir auch! Schönen Tag noch und viel Erfolg!

9.3 Interview Orientierungszeiten

04.08.2025 14:00

Interviewpartnerin: Dr. phil. Imke-Marie Badur

Clara Mehringer: Vielen Dank, dass du dir die Zeit nimmst Imke! Bitte stell dich doch bitte einmal kurz vor und auch deine Rolle bei Bachelor of Being.

Imke-Marie Badur: Ich bin Dr. Imke Marie Padur. Ich bin Diplom-Kulturpädagogin und habe in Musikpsychologie promoviert. In meiner Forschung habe ich mich intensiv mit Sozialisationsprozessen im Zusammenhang mit Musik beschäftigt – Erkenntnisse, die sich auch gut auf andere Sozialisationsprozesse übertragen lassen. Ich habe eine Ausbildung zur integralen Coachin an der Integralis Akademie in Hamburg gemacht – genauer gesagt zur integralen Beraterin. Ich habe mich viel im Bereich von Lebensgemeinschaften engagiert, insbesondere in ökologischen Lebensgemeinschaften. Auch im Bereich therapeutischer Methoden bin ich sehr aktiv, mit zahlreichen Weiterbildungen in verschiedenen Ansätzen. Dreizehn Jahre lang habe ich an der Universität Kassel den Bereich Service Learning, also Lernen durch Engagement, aufgebaut und geleitet. Ich habe außerdem die Scientists for Future Gruppe in Kassel mitgegründet. Schließlich habe ich mich dazu entschieden, mein Herzensprojekt zu verwirklichen: den Bachelor of Being. Dafür habe ich mich selbstständig gemacht und vor vier Jahren die gemeinnützige GmbH Orientierungszeiten gGmbH gegründet. Wir haben auf dieser Basis ein fünfmonatiges Projekt gestartet, das sich an skandinavischen Vorbildern

orientiert. Heute bin ich geschäftsführende Gesellschafterin dieser gGmbH – und gleichzeitig auch ihre pädagogische Leitung.

Clara Mehringer: Magst du auch noch ein paar Worte zu Orientierungszeiten beziehungsweise zu eurem Programm sagen – und es kurz vorstellen?

Imke-Marie Badur: Der Bachelor of Being ist ein fünfmonatiges Orientierungsprogramm für junge Erwachsene – inspiriert vom skandinavischen Vorbild, was sowohl das Lebensformat als auch das Konzept der Übergangszeit betrifft. In unserem Projekt wohnen 24 junge Menschen für fünf Monate gemeinschaftlich auf einem Biolandhof. In dieser Zeit beschäftigen sie sich intensiv mit sich selbst, mit den Herausforderungen in der Welt und mit ihren Beziehungen. Eingebettet ist das Programm in eine größere Bewegung, die ich seit 2017 versuche in Deutschland zu etablieren – mit dem Ziel, dass es viel mehr solcher Orte gibt, an denen junge Menschen sich selbst besser finden können. Dafür habe ich unter anderem die Website infoportal-orientierungszeiten.de ins Leben gerufen, auf der ich seit 2017 alle mir bekannten Angebote dieser Art sichtbar mache. Inzwischen gibt es auch einen kleinen Verbund von vier Organisationen, die mehrmonatige Orientierungszeiten anbieten. Unsere Vision ist es, dass es in Deutschland ähnlich wird wie in Skandinavien: Dort ist dieses Format staatlich finanziert, rund 10 % der Schulabgänger*innen nehmen zunächst an so einer Auszeit teil. Es gibt dort sogar ein gesetzlich verankertes Recht auf Sabbatical – sodass sich auch ältere Menschen solche Orientierungszeiten nehmen können. Und das tun sie auch, in großem Stil – an sogenannten Folkehøjskoler. In Deutschland ist dieses Modell bislang noch wenig bekannt – aber es ist meine Mission, das zu ändern. Weil ich es für absolut zentral halte, insbesondere mit Blick auf die nachhaltige Transformation.

Clara Mehringer: Wunderbar, dankeschön. Das ist der perfekte Übergang zu meiner nächsten Frage, und zwar: Inwiefern ihr – beziehungsweise du – eure Arbeit, euren Impact von Orientierungszeiten, als Beitrag zu einer, ja, nachhaltigeren Gesellschaft, Welt, Transformation versteht?

Imke-Marie Badur: Ja, ganz, ganz stark, auf jeden Fall. Das ist quasi auch mein innerer Antrieb. Wobei ich gar nicht so genau sagen kann, welche das sind. Also, wir haben ja drei Säulen im Bachelor of Being, das muss ich vielleicht noch sagen: Wir haben die Berufs- und Lebensorientierung, dann das Thema Resilienz und Lebensfreude, oder soziale Kompetenzen, wie man es nennen will, und den Bereich nachhaltige Transformation. Der ganz große Antrieb ist für mich die nachhaltige Transformation. Aber auch das Thema psychische Gesundheit, Mental Health, spielt eine große Rolle und ist damit ganz eng verknüpft und hat natürlich auch seinen eigenen Wert. Wenn ich meine private Motivation betrachte, ist es eine Mischung. Mein privater Antrieb ist auf jeden Fall, dass ich mich im Jugendalter emotional sehr einsam und verloren gefühlt habe und daraus einen Antrieb entwickelt habe, etwas zu verändern. Gleichzeitig ist mein größerer Wunsch, dass wir die Gesellschaft in Richtung Nachhaltigkeit, Gerechtigkeit und Frieden entwickeln.

Clara Mehringer: Inwiefern nimmst du das wahr, dass eure Arbeit da drauf Einfluss nimmt?

Imke-Marie Badur: Ja, auf jeden Fall hat das einen sehr starken Einfluss, und zwar auf ganz unterschiedliche Weise. Aber vielleicht muss ich vorher noch eine andere Frage beantworten, die du auch schon gestellt hast. Nach außen hin werden wir sehr stark als Berufsorientierungsprojekt wahrgenommen, und ehrlich gesagt ist mir das gar nicht so wichtig. Das ist eher der Lockvogel, mit dem wir die Leute reinholen. Darüber gelingt natürlich auch die Finanzierung, und es hängt natürlich auch total mit den anderen Themen zusammen. Mir geht es schlecht, wenn ich nicht weiß, was ich beruflich machen soll, oder wenn ich sehe, was in der Welt los ist. Also das hängt alles miteinander zusammen. Aber über dieses Thema kommen die jungen Leute in größerer Zahl zu uns. Das ist das, was sie am meisten anzieht: die Unsicherheit darüber, was sie beruflich machen sollen. Zuerst würde ich sagen, die jungen Leute kommen wegen der Berufsorientierung zu uns, aber dann rückt plötzlich der ganze Bereich „Ich und meine Beziehungen“ sehr stark in den Fokus. Sie stärken sich gegenseitig, lernen sich selbst besser kennen, lernen mit ihren Gefühlen und Gefühlsstürmen umzugehen und können sich selbst regulieren. Wir

beschäftigen uns mit Nervensystemen und nehmen sehr deutlich wahr, wann man erregt ist oder nicht. Außerdem üben wir ein, wie wirklich nährnde Beziehungen funktionieren, wie man um Dinge bitten kann und sich auch abgrenzen kann. Wir durchschauen unsere Prägungen, die aus der Familie kommen, aber auch aus der Gesellschaft, sodass eine ganz neue Perspektive auf sich selbst entsteht. Und wie passiert dann die Wendung? Die meisten unserer Teilnehmenden gehen raus und haben Lust auf ihr Leben, Lust, das Leben zu gestalten. Sie kommen raus aus der Lethargie. Wir haben auch einige Wochen, in denen wir uns mit den Problemen der Welt und den Krisen beschäftigen und machen verschiedene Übungen, um wieder eine tiefere Verbindung zur Natur zu finden oder eine ganzheitliche Sichtweise zu entwickeln. Wir stellen ihnen Transformationstheorien vor, die sehr mutmachend sind. Dann entsteht etwas wie: „Ich möchte jetzt mein Leben gestalten und zwar so, dass es darauf einzahlt.“ Dieser Satz „Ich bin Gestalterin“ kommt ganz oft am Ende. Die, die am Ende ungeduldig sind, wollen endlich raus – weg von dieser Insel, die natürlich auch fünf Monate lang im Winter wirklich hart sein kann. Aber dazu kommt das Bewusstsein: „Ich habe jetzt verstanden, wie wertvoll und kostbar das Leben ist, worauf es ankommt und was mir wirklich wichtig ist.“ Das ist dann etwas anderes, als sie vorher gedacht haben. Es entsteht ein großer Wunsch, Lebendigkeit zu spüren, mit anderen Menschen zusammen zu sein und sich einzubringen. Das muss nicht unbedingt in ökologischen Projekten sein, sondern kann auch bedeuten, dass sie an ihrer Hochschule aktiv werden oder in sozialen Projekten mitarbeiten. Manchmal schlummert das noch, weil sie erst ihre Ausbildung oder ihr Studium weiterverfolgen oder erst einmal die Welt mit neugierigen Augen bereisen möchten. Aber der Samen ist gelegt, da bin ich mir ganz sicher. Wir fragen das natürlich auch ab, und ich bin manchmal wirklich erstaunt, dass Leute im Studium so viel Ehrenamt leisten, etwa in drei Organisationen mitwirken. Das freut mich dann immer sehr.

Clara Mehringer: Sehr schön, oh, ich habe gerade richtig Gänsehaut bekommen, als du gesagt hast, sie scharren mit den Hufen und wollen Gestalterinnen sein. Das ist mega cool, super schön. Du bist ja schon ein bisschen darauf eingegangen, wer eure Zielgruppe ist und an wen sich euer

Programm richtet. Kommt diese Zielgruppe, also diese jungen Erwachsenen, zu euch?

Imke-Marie Badur: Ja, genau, also das ist eben dieses Thema: „Ich weiß gar nicht, was ich machen soll.“ Ich kenne mich überhaupt nicht richtig, und das macht mich auch ganz fertig, was in der Welt passiert. Ja, so ist das eigentlich die Hauptmotivation. Wir heißen Bachelor of Being, was nahelegt, dass es eher für Leute ist, die Abitur haben, so ist es dann tatsächlich auch. Also etwa zwei Drittel haben Abitur, ein Drittel hat aber auch andere Abschlüsse. Das ist keine formelle Voraussetzung bei uns, aber wie wir arbeiten, ist es schon eher auf dem Niveau der 12. Klasse, würde ich mal sagen. Aber wir nehmen auch Leute, die kognitiv vielleicht nicht allem folgen können, das macht überhaupt nichts aus. Die sind dann auch sehr geborgen bei uns. Manchmal bin ich wirklich sehr erstaunt, wie viele junge Leute wir anziehen mit extrem hohem Potenzial. Eine 1,0 im Abi ist bei uns überhaupt keine Seltenheit, richtig gute Leute. Gleichzeitig kommen aber auch viele, die psychische Probleme haben, also solche, die entweder nach einem Klinikaufenthalt noch zu uns kommen, um das quasi als Wiedereingliederung zu nutzen, oder die eine ambulante Psychotherapie hatten oder noch in den letzten Zügen davon sind. Manchmal auch Leute mit ADHS, das ist auch nicht so selten. Ja, wie kann man die noch beschreiben?

Clara Mehringer: Danke. Ja, und du hattest vorhin schon gesagt, dass das Thema Berufsfindung und das „Ich weiß nicht, was ich beruflich machen möchte“ bei euch gut funktioniert als eine Art Lockvogel, also das, was man nach außen zeigt. Was hat sich in der Kommunikation und im Format eurer Angebote bewährt? Wodurch habt ihr gemerkt, dass Leute zu euch kommen? Was funktioniert als Marketing, und was hat vielleicht nicht so gut funktioniert?

Imke-Marie Badur: Also wir machen ja auch Sommercamps, und da haben wir noch ein bisschen mehr experimentiert. Der Bachelor of Being ist so dargestellt, wie er ist, aber bei den Camps haben wir experimentiert und merken ganz deutlich, dass es gut funktioniert, wenn wir das Engagement in den Mittelpunkt stellen und zeigen, wie man Gestalter sein kann. Wir

hatten zum Beispiel „Grow for Future“ als Thema. Da ist zwar auch „Grow“ drin, aber es bleibt „for Future“ – das erinnert eben an Nachhaltigkeitsengagement, und das funktioniert eher schwierig, das ist nicht so gut fürs Berufliche. Ich sag mal, was funktioniert, ist Zeit zum Sein.

Clara Mehringer: Wie erklärst du dir das, dass das nicht funktioniert?

Imke-Marie Badur: Für ein bewusstes Leben lernen zu meditieren, Zeit zum Sein ist schon ein guter Slogan. Ja, und berufliche Orientierungslosigkeit geht auch. Wenn du nicht weißt, was du machen sollst, dann schau mal bei uns vorbei. Wir bieten dir eine andere Art der Berufsorientierung an, die eine Etage tiefer ansetzt. Das klingt jetzt sehr grob, aber ich glaube, so ist es tatsächlich.

Clara Mehringer: Also das ist auch ein bisschen mein Verständnis davon, dass dieses ganze Thema Persönlichkeitsentwicklung, bei sich sein, also das, was du gerade gesagt hast, funktioniert. Wenn man aber von außen herangeht und sagt: „Mach du was, damit die Welt nachhaltiger wird“, dann funktioniert das nicht so gut. Ich glaube, das ist auch mit ein Grund, warum Nachhaltigkeit oder innere Nachhaltigkeit manchmal schnell abschreckend klingt, weil das Wort Nachhaltigkeit dabei ist. Und das wäre auch meine nächste Frage: Was siehst du für Chancen, um innere Nachhaltigkeit breiter zu verankern, diese zu skalieren innerhalb der Gesellschaft? Gerne auch etwas zur Kommunikation, zur Art, wie das Thema verstanden wird und wie man es nach außen tragen kann. Ich würde gern hören, welche Gedanken du dazu hast, welche Chancen du siehst, um das Thema in der Gesellschaft breiter zu verankern.

Imke-Marie Badur: Für unsere Organisation wollen wir auf jeden Fall weitere Bachelor of Being Standorte gründen, weil wir fest davon überzeugt sind, dass es Zeit braucht. Das braucht wirklich Zeit, und bei allen Schulprojekten, Festivals oder Wochenendseminaren kann man ja nur reinschnuppern oder theoretisch mal verstehen, ja die Zusammenhänge, aber man kann sie nicht wirklich spüren. Das funktioniert so nicht. Deshalb mache ich ja so ein aufwendiges Projekt, weil ich vom Format überzeugt bin. Manchmal würde es ja schon reichen, wenn man es überhaupt erst mal versteht und mitkriegt, aber da gibt es eben diesen Handlungsgap. Ich

glaube, wir brauchen einfach mehr Zeit. Für mich könnten das auch dreiwöchige oder vierwöchige Programme sein, aber so viel Zeit braucht es auf jeden Fall. In drei Tagen kann ich gar nicht wirklich echt ich selbst werden. Ich sitze da künstlich und gebe ein schönes Bild von mir ab. Aus unserer Erfahrung fallen die Masken erst nach fünf bis sechs Wochen. Und dann wird es spannend, denn die Pseudogemeinschaft ist vorbei und die Frage ist, wer wir dann sind, wenn ich wirklich privat bin mit all dem, was wirklich bei mir ist. Das ist meine Lebensvision, dass wir das aufbauen. Gleichzeitig sehe ich aber, dass die Nachfrage so ist, dass es anachronistisch wirkt, so etwas langes zu machen. Die jungen Leute, aber auch die Älteren wollen gar nicht lange von zu Hause weg sein. Da ist viel: Ich bleibe lieber in meiner Komfortzone, ich mache lieber ein Online-Seminar. Ich möchte mich verändern, aber ich möchte gewaschen sein, ohne mich nass zu machen. Das ist sehr verbreitet, und da bin ich auch ein bisschen ratlos. Ein Projekt aus unserem Verbund, der Falter in Heidelberg, ein Berufsorientierungsprogramm, findet dieses Jahr nicht statt, weil sie nicht genug Teilnehmende gefunden haben, und ich finde das sehr schade. Von der WKS-Ausbildung habe ich gehört, dass junge Pastoren nach dem Theologiestudium, die Blockseminare von zwei bis vier Wochen Länge hatten, das nicht mehr wollen. Sie wollen nur noch maximal vier Nächte weg sein, den Rest online lernen. Da ist viel, ich weiß nicht, was das ist – Erschöpfung? Ich bin zu KO, um mich in so einen Prozess zu begeben? Was könnte das sein? Deshalb ist es umso wichtiger, dass wir mit „Zeit für dich“ werben. Da sehe ich eine Chance. In Schulen höre ich oft: Der Bachelor of Being, unser Ziel müsste sein, so einen Kurs überflüssig zu machen, weil wir das alles in der Schule abdecken. Ich verweise dann immer auf Skandinavien, wo es auch nicht obsolet ist, obwohl sie ein gutes Schulsystem haben. Dort wird der Einzelne mehr mit seinen Lernwünschen gesehen. Aber solange Schule bewertet, kann man keine Persönlichkeitsentwicklung machen. Ich kann nicht mit meinem Lehrer Persönlichkeitsentwicklung machen, wenn er mich danach bewertet. Das funktioniert einfach nicht, das kann man vergessen. Deshalb bin ich da ratlos, wie man das schnell in die Breite bringt, außer wirklich Geld in die Hand zu nehmen und zu sagen: Das ist nun mal so. Zum Beispiel ein halbes

Jahr Pflichtdienst und ein halbes Jahr Bachelor of Being, so dass das für jeden jungen Menschen gesellschaftlich empfohlen wird. Das wäre toll. Ich finde auch nicht, dass man nur den Bachelor of Being machen muss, man soll gerne reisen und Freiwilligendienste machen dürfen, aber so ein Anteil davon müsste schon eine längere Zeit in einer Gruppe sein. Der Impact von Gruppenleben ist immens. Ich verstehe wirklich: Wenn ich es nicht mache, macht es keiner. Wenn ich die Toilette dreckig hinterlasse, bleibt sie dreckig. Diese Grunderfahrungen müssen gemacht werden. Das geht in der Schule nicht. Man geht über die dreckigen Toiletten hinweg, alle regen sich auf. Ich würde mich in meiner Klasse hinstellen, auf die dreckige Toilette zeigen und fragen: Was machen wir jetzt? Woran liegt das? Was ist hier los zwischen uns?

Clara Mehringer: Ja, sehr spannend. Gerade dieser Gruppenaspekt war mir noch gar nicht so bewusst, aber jetzt, wo du ihn angesprochen hast, finde ich ihn total wichtig. Das ist auch meine letzte Frage, die ich mir noch überlegt habe.

Imke-Marie Badur: Ja, aber warte mal, ich möchte noch etwas zum Gruppenaspekt ergänzen. Unsere Teilnehmenden üben und lernen vor allem, Konflikte anzusprechen. Nicht nur die Technik, wie man Kritik übt – das ist auch wichtig – aber viel wichtiger ist der Mut dazu. Wir können noch so viele Kommunikationstechniken an Hochschulen lehren, GFK-Kurse geben und so weiter, aber wenn ich nicht den Mut habe, auf die Person zuzugehen, mit der ich eine Unstimmigkeit spüre, dann bringt das nichts. Die Angst ist das größte Hindernis. Wir machen Formate, die wir „Beziehungsräume putzen“ nennen. Dabei stehen alle auf der Wiese verteilt, mit großem Abstand, und es gibt zwei Stunden Zeit, um Beziehungsräume zu putzen. Jeder wird aufgefordert, auf Menschen zuzugehen, mit denen in den letzten 14 Tagen etwas vorgefallen ist oder bei denen Vorbehalte bestehen. Das kann alles Mögliche sein: Neid, Eifersucht, derjenige hat mir beim Essen das letzte Stück vor der Nase weggeschnappt oder sich vorm Putzen gedrückt – eben auch die kleinen Sachen. Dann nimmt man all seinen Mut zusammen und spricht es an. Die Erfahrung der Teilnehmenden ist, dass das eine schöne Erfahrung ist. Oft sagen sie danach, „Oh, das habe ich gar nicht gemerkt, es tut mir leid“ und

sind davon berührt. Dann geht man weiter und merkt, dass das die Beziehung intensiviert, sie nicht kaputtmacht, sondern schöner und tiefer macht. Das brauchen wir auch für die nachhaltige Transformation. Wie oft habe ich an der Uni erlebt, dass schon eine kleine Missstimmung ein Projekt zum Scheitern bringt, weil jemand denkt, „Mit dem will ich nicht zusammenarbeiten, der hat ja das im Nebensatz gesagt.“ So kommen wir nicht voran. Das ist auch ein ganz wichtiger Gemeinschaftsaspekt bei uns.

Clara Mehringer: Ich bin total inspiriert von diesem Ausdruck „Beziehungsräume putzen“, mega stark. Das ist genau das, was ich auch total wahrnehme: Man kann das ja auf einer ganz kleinen Ebene sehen, so wie du es eben beschrieben hast, aber genauso auf einer politischen Ebene. Wie schnell gehen da Themen kaputt oder funktionieren nicht, weil es einfach nicht gelingt, dass sich Leute ehrlich und aufrichtig begegnen. Da wird für mich sehr offensichtlich, wie wichtig dieser Beitrag auf gesellschaftlicher Ebene ist – wenn das im Kleinen gelingt, hat das richtig große Wirkung.

Imke-Marie Badur: Genau, genau, absolut. Erzähl mir, wie es den Teilnehmenden geht. Ich habe vor einiger Zeit eine SMS von einem Ehemaligen bekommen, der sagt: „Imke, du glaubst gar nicht, wie sehr mir der Bob nützt. Ich bin in meinem Studium immer derjenige, der die Kleingruppen moderiert und leitet. Ich spüre genau, was in der Gruppe gerade los ist und kann das auch verbal analysieren und dafür sorgen, dass Konflikte geklärt werden.“ Und das macht er dann auch bei einer Studienarbeit. Das heißt, sie üben das, was sie im Bob gelernt haben, weiter, und wenn sie dann in ein paar Jahren in die Arbeitswelt gehen, tragen sie diese Fähigkeiten dorthin.

Clara Mehringer: Sehr spannend! Was für Barrieren nimmst du wahr? Also sowohl auf einer kleinen, individuellen Ebene als auch auf einer größeren, politischen, gesellschaftlichen Ebene, diese innere Transformation und Persönlichkeitsentwicklung einfach an Leute ranzubringen. Du hast schon ein paar Sachen angesprochen. Gibt es da noch andere Barrieren oder Herausforderungen, die du wahrnimmst?

Imke-Marie Badur: Also wir werden auch belächelt. Ich weiß nicht, inwieweit du Spiral Dynamics kennst, das Bewusstseinsentwicklungsmodell aus der ganzen orangenen und blauen Szene. Die blaue Szene will eher, dass Berufsorientierung wichtig ist, aber alles andere können sie gar nicht sehen oder begreifen, worüber ich rede. Und die orangen finden uns lächerlich, also die ganze Uni-Szene. Das passiert jetzt erst ganz langsam, wie gesagt, dass jetzt mal so ein Studiengang konzipiert werden soll, wo das vorkommt. Aber eigentlich sind wir so ein paar Esoteriker, ein paar Spinner, ein paar Achtsamkeitsmenschen. Klar, Achtsamkeit in der Hochschule, ja so. Es gibt da auch schon mal Sektenvorwürfe, weil wir verschiedene Meditationsformen ausprobieren. Da gibt es viel Ängste. Oder die Frage, ob wir den jungen Menschen Glaubenssysteme beibringen wollen oder so. Die Übergänge sind natürlich fließend. Die nächste Yogalehrerin meint dann: Wir müssen nur uns und die Zukunft manifestieren, dann wird alles gut. Das passiert im Bachelor of Being nicht. Wir manifestieren keine Zukünfte im esoterischen Sinne. Natürlich beschäftigen wir uns mit Zukunftsbildern, aber das ist etwas anderes, als wenn ich mit Laura Malina Seiler rede und denke, ich muss mir nur manifestieren, dann wird alles gut.

Clara Mehringer: Mhm siehst du einen Weg, um von diesem Bild oder diesem Vorurteil wegzukommen, esoterisch zu sein?

Imke-Marie Badur: Ich passe wie ein Schießhund auf, dass nichts derart in mein Bildungsprojekt reinkommt, um da ganz, ganz sicher zu sein. Ich meine, natürlich haben wir Teilnehmende, die ihre eigenen Glaubensauffassungen mitbringen. Ja, auch Esoteriker haben wir, die da sind, aber es ist ganz, ganz klar: Ich sage denen, dass das im Bachelor of Being keine Rolle spielen darf. Ich möchte da wirklich sehr, sehr bodenständig bleiben. Wir drücken das mit psychologischen Begriffen aus, wo das geht, also die Prozesse, die inneren Prozesse und was da wirksam ist, formulieren wir mit psychologischem Vokabular und nicht mit esoterischem, obwohl es natürlich Überschneidungen gibt. Wenn ich zum Beispiel Aufstellungsarbeit mache, dann kann ich das esoterisch begründen, oder ich kann es psychologisch begründen – und ich bin klar für die psychologische Begründung im Rahmen des Bachelor of Being. Sonst muss alles mit mir im Gespräch sein. Und ehrlich gesagt, nervt es mich total,

wenn es ein christliches Projekt ist, das von Kirchen getragen wird, dann schreit niemand „Oh Gott, oh Gott!“. Das ist auch ein Glaubenskonzept, das auf grundlegende menschliche Erfahrungen gelegt wurde. Mir geht es um diese grundlegenden menschlichen Erfahrungen.

Clara Mehringer: Ja, wunderbar, vielen, vielen Dank, das sind echt mega wichtige Insights dabei. Ich kann jetzt glaube ich sehr, sehr viel damit anfangen, auch im Rahmen meiner Masterarbeit. Ich hatte jetzt ganz viele Assoziationen zu den anderen Ergebnissen, die ich in meiner Analyse gefunden habe. Also herzlichen Dank dafür! Jetzt noch die letzte Frage an dich: Gibt es noch irgendetwas, das du hinzufügen möchtest? Oder etwas, das dir noch wichtig ist?

Imke-Marie Badur: Ne, das passt alles so.

Clara Mehringer: Wenn dir im Nachgang noch etwas einfällt, kannst du mir das gerne noch schreiben. Oder falls dir noch eine Reflexion einfällt, die für dich wichtig war, schreib mir das gerne, dann kann ich das auch noch mit aufnehmen. Wenn nicht, wie gesagt, sind die ganzen Antworten, die du mir jetzt gegeben hast, super hilfreich für mich und helfen mir auch, das Ganze besser einzuordnen. Ja, ganz herzlichen Dank und alles Gute!

Imke-Marie Badur: Danke, dir auch! Alles Gute für dich Clara, ich hoffe wir bleiben in Kontakt und ich höre dann von dir!

9.4 Interview Pioneers of change

04.08.2025 14:00

Interviewpartnerin: Mag. MA Elisabeth Rohrmoser

Clara Mehringer: Magst du einmal dich und deine Rolle bei Pioneers of Change vorstellen?

Elisabeth Rohrmoser: Ich war 2010 Teilnehmerin des ersten Jahrestrainings von Pioneers of Change und kenne die Organisation somit seit ihren Anfängen, ebenso wie die Gründungspersonen. In den darauffolgenden Jahren war ich vor allem in der Community-Bildung zwischen den einzelnen Jahrgängen der Lerngänge aktiv, da jedes Jahr ein

neues Training stattfand. Ab 2014 habe ich offiziell mitgearbeitet, und 2015 waren wir an der Gründung des eigenständigen Vereins beteiligt. In der Folgezeit hatte ich vor allem Rollen im Hintergrund inne – unter anderem auch bedingt durch meine Familienphase mit zwei Kindern. Zuletzt war ich für den Bereich Community und Kooperationen verantwortlich. Ich betreue beispielsweise die Plattform für unsere Mitglieder, die sogenannten Pioneers Members, sowie größere Live-Veranstaltungen wie den Summercampus oder das ReConnect. Darüber hinaus bin ich auch im Leitungskreis bzw. Vorstand aktiv.

Clara Mehringer: Dankeschön. Was genau macht denn Pioneers of Change als Organisation?

Elisabeth Rohmoser: Pioneers of Change ist vor allem im Bereich der Bildungsarbeit aktiv und gliedert sich grob in drei Bereiche: Inspiration, Bildung und Community. Inspiration meint Formate wie den Online Summit, den du ja kennst – hier geht es darum, eine Vision für eine andere Welt zu verbreiten und Menschen durch Mut und Inspiration handlungsfähig zu machen. Das passiert auch über Newsletter, Interviews, Blogartikel oder Inhalte auf unserer Membership-Plattform. Im Bereich Bildung sind wir mittlerweile recht vielfältig aufgestellt, mit vielen Online-Kursen, aber auch Live-Angeboten. Dabei geht es oft um innere Entwicklung – was ja gut zu deinen Themen passt. Gleichzeitig wünschen wir uns öfter, dass noch mehr Fokus auf Wirksamkeit und Projektumsetzung kommt. Unsere Formate reichen von Kursen zur persönlichen Orientierung bis hin zu methodischen Trainings, die man direkt im Arbeitskontext oder im Team anwenden kann – also für sehr unterschiedliche Zielgruppen. Genau, der Bildungsbereich und der Bereich Community – also das soziale Feld – waren lange Zeit vor allem darauf ausgerichtet, Absolventinnen und Absolventen unserer Kurse miteinander zu verbinden, sodass sie auch nach Kursende in Kontakt bleiben und sich weiterhin zugehörig fühlen. Mehr und mehr entwickeln wir diesen Bereich nun weiter, indem wir gezielt Kooperationen mit anderen Initiativen aufbauen und das Feld über unsere eigenen Absolventinnen und Absolventen hinaus stärken und erweitern wollen.

Clara Mehringer: Alles klar. Dankeschön für die kurze Vorstellung. Inwiefern verstehst du oder generell ihr als Organisation, eure Arbeit als Beitrag zu einer Nachhaltigkeits-Transformation?

Elisabeth Rohrmoser: Das ist total spannend. Wir haben im Laufe des letzten Jahres begonnen, statt von „nachhaltig wirken“ immer öfter von „regenerativ wirken“ zu sprechen. Das orientiert sich an dem Ansatz von Daniel Christian Wahl, der ein Modell beschreibt, in dem Nachhaltigkeit ein Zustand des Erhalts ist – während Regeneration darüber hinausgeht, indem man dem Leben etwas zurückgibt, also aktiv fördert, was lebendig ist und dem Kreislauf des Lebens dient. Dieser Perspektivwechsel ist bei uns gerade im Gange – ein größerer Bedeutungswandel. Wenn ich in den klassischen Nachhaltigkeitsbegriff zurückgehe, muss ich ein bisschen graben. Aber was auf jeden Fall stimmt, ist: Das Leben zu unterstützen und dem Leben zu dienen – das verstehen wir unter regenerativ. Und das beginnt bei uns oft im Inneren, also auf den eigenen Körper zu hören, auf innere Impulse zu achten, weil sich darin das Leben ebenfalls zeigt. Und dann geht es weiter bis hin zur Natur, zur Frage, wie wir etwas zurückgeben können und uns als Teil eines größeren Kreislaufs verstehen. Ich denke schon, dass das mit dem Nachhaltigkeitsbegriff zusammenpasst – gerade in ökologischer und sozialer Hinsicht. Was bei uns manchmal mit hineingespielt hat, ist die Verbindung zu Menschen wie Alfred und Silvia, die vom Plenum aus mitgegründet haben. Die haben viel im Bereich Nachhaltigkeit in Unternehmen gemacht – das wären vielleicht spannende Interviewpartner für dich, wenn du den unternehmerischen Aspekt vertiefen willst. Alfred findest du über Plenum. Aber insgesamt hatte ich das Gefühl, dass wir selbst nie stark in diese wirtschaftlich geprägte Nachhaltigkeitsschiene gegangen sind, sondern uns vielmehr mit persönlicher Entwicklung und Transformation beschäftigt haben.

Clara Mehringer: Und inwiefern siehst du die Relevanz von der persönlichen Transformation, also von innerer Nachhaltigkeit für die Entwicklung einer regenerativen Gesellschaft?

Elisabeth Rohrmoser: Ja, genau. Ich glaube, da bin ich selbst auch immer wieder in der Frage, wo wir eigentlich am wirksamsten sind. Bei Pioneers of

Change sagen wir oft, dass wir an der Schnittstelle von innen und außen arbeiten – also dort, wo sich innere Entwicklung im Außen zeigt, zum Beispiel in einem Projekt, und wo umgekehrt auch das, was im Außen geschieht, wieder auf die innere Entwicklung zurückwirkt. Wir verstehen das als ein Wechselspiel, bei dem wir selbst wirksam werden mit dem, was wir in unserem direkten Umfeld tun – ohne uns dabei überhöhen zu wollen. Aber das ist unser Ansatz: dass in diesem Zusammenspiel Wirkung entsteht. Wir versuchen auch, die Haltung zu verändern, mit der wir Dinge tun, und besonders auch, wie wir mit Gruppen umgehen – aber auch über andere Wege wie Schreiben, Blogartikel oder unseren Newsletter. Insgesamt ist die Frage nach der Wirksamkeit sehr relevant für uns, und sie wird auch in unserer Organisation und bei unseren Veranstaltungen immer wieder diskutiert: Sind wir wirksam, wenn wir uns nur mit dem Inneren beschäftigen? Oder sind wir zu wenig im Außen? Oder vielleicht auch zu wenig im Innen? Ich glaube, wir haben keine abschließende Antwort darauf, aber wir versuchen, an dieser Schnittstelle zu sein – und Formate zu entwickeln, die entweder das eine oder das andere gezielt stärken.

Clara Mehringer: Wir haben vorhin schon kurz darüber gesprochen, wen ihr anspricht und welche Zielgruppen ihr habt. Du hast erwähnt, dass es verschiedene Zielgruppen gibt. Mit welchen inneren Herausforderungen, Bedürfnissen oder Problemen kommen diese Zielgruppen zu euch? Du kannst gerne auch auf unterschiedliche Zielgruppen eingehen.

Elisabeth Rohmoser: Genau, was spannend ist, ist, dass wir über unseren Online-Summit und die Kommunikation per E-Mail vor allem Menschen ab der Lebensmitte ansprechen – also nicht mehr ganz so Junge. Unsere Gründungspersonen sind inzwischen alle um die 50, und dadurch richtet sich vieles an diese Altersgruppe. Wir wollen zwar auch jüngere Menschen erreichen, aber bei diesen Inspirationsformaten sind oft auch Pensionist*innen oder Menschen mitten im Berufsleben dabei, die sich fragen, ob sie das Richtige tun. Häufig geht es dabei um das Thema, wie man aus dem Hamsterrad aussteigen kann und sinnvoll beitragen – also Orientierungslosigkeit und die Frage, wo der eigene Platz angesichts der Krisen in der Welt ist. Die Bedürfnisse der Zielgruppe drehen sich also oft um Sinnfindung und Orientierung. Sehr geschätzt wird in unseren

Veranstaltungen auch der Generationenmix, weil ältere und jüngere Menschen sich begegnen und oft der Wunsch entsteht, noch mehr Verbindung zu schaffen. Ein häufig genanntes Thema ist, sich auch persönlich zu treffen, da wir viel online arbeiten. Es gibt das Bedürfnis, andere wirklich kennenzulernen und auch im eigenen Umfeld, etwa in der Nachbarschaft, aktiv zu werden. Solche Gruppen oder Werkteams entstehen manchmal, könnten aber noch stärker ausgebaut werden. Zudem merken wir, dass unser Newsletter, in dem wir größere Themen und Zusammenhänge erklären, sehr viel gelesen wird und aktuell besonders nachgefragt ist, weil er Orientierung gibt.

Clara Mehringer: Spannend, dass du das direkt ansprichst, denn das wäre genau mein nächster Punkt: die Kommunikation. Du hast den Newsletter erwähnt, der offenbar gut funktioniert. Welche Kommunikationsarten oder Kanäle haben sich bei euch bewährt, und was eher weniger?

Elisabeth Rohrmoser: Das wäre eher eine Frage für das Marketingteam, wir probieren viel aus. Es gibt viele Social-Media-Kanäle, manche kenne ich selbst kaum, wie Blue Sky oder so. Insgesamt sind es wohl etwa sechs Kanäle, die wir aktuell bespielen, zum Beispiel auch beim Summit, aber auch kontinuierlich darüber hinaus. Ich selbst habe nur den Signalkanal abonniert, wo dann ab und zu Infos zu Webinaren oder Ähnlichem kommen. Das ist eher ein Broadcasting-Kanal. Wir versuchen gerade, über mehr Kanäle verschiedene Zielgruppen zu erreichen. Was sich weniger bewährt hat, ist unsere interne Plattform, für die man sich einloggen muss. Während der Kurse funktioniert sie gut, um dran zu bleiben, aber die Einstiegshürde ist für viele eine Herausforderung.

Clara Mehringer: Und was für Formate jetzt so aus deiner Erfahrung haben sich bewährt?

Elisabeth Rohrmoser: Online funktioniert sehr gut. Wir haben mittlerweile viel Erfahrung mit Formaten von Online-Kursen, bei denen es zum Beispiel vorher ein offenes Webinar gibt, dann eine Anmeldephase über eine gewisse Zeit, anschließend einige Infocalls, und dann startet der Kurs. Dabei wurde auch viel mit der Länge und Intensität der Online-Kurse experimentiert. Was bei uns oft herausgestellt wird, was gut funktioniert und

was andere nicht machen sollten, sind Weggemeinschaften – also Gruppen von sieben bis zehn Personen, die von jemandem aus dem Kursteam moderiert werden. So gibt es eine persönliche Begleitung, die in vielen Kursen im Vordergrund steht. Das ist, glaube ich, ziemlich einzigartig und wird bei anderen Organisationen nicht so oft angeboten. Live-Treffen, wie eine Woche oder ein Wochenende, funktionieren ebenfalls gut und haben einen anderen Charakter. Finanzielle Vorteile haben Online-Kurse, weil wir keine Kosten für Unterkunft und so weiter haben, wodurch sie für Teilnehmende niederschwelliger sind.

Clara Mehringer: Und wenn du das Thema Online-Formate schon ansprichst, sehe ich das als Chance, Persönlichkeitsentwicklung im Kontext nachhaltiger Transformation breiter in der Gesellschaft zu verankern und besser zu skalieren. Welche weiteren Chancen siehst du aus eurer Arbeit heraus, um dieses Thema, das in meiner Masterarbeit zentral ist, zukünftig breiter zu etablieren und zu verbreiten?

Elisabeth Rohrmoser: Für mich ist es überraschend, wie gut die Online-Summits noch immer funktionieren und wie sie sich entwickelt haben. Jedes Mal erreichen sie viele Tausend Menschen, die sich auch die Interviews anschauen. Das ist für mich bemerkenswert, besonders weil wir schon seit Jahren denken, dass das vielleicht irgendwann nicht mehr so gut funktioniert. Mittlerweile machen aber auch viele Organisationen solche Formate. Wie lange das noch so funktioniert, kann ich schwer sagen. Wir haben überlegt, einen Podcast zu starten, aber das ist bisher nur ein Experiment und noch nicht wirklich umgesetzt. Das könnte eine Möglichkeit sein, besonders da Podcasts gerade bei jüngeren Zielgruppen beliebt sind und tiefergehende Inhalte bieten können. In unserem Membership-Bereich versuchen wir, Interviews mit Vertiefungsräumen und thematischen Workshops zu kombinieren. Das machen wir auch teilweise beim Online-Summit. Das dient eher der Vertiefung. Das Skalieren geschieht unserer Erfahrung nach vor allem durch das Verbreiten von Inspiration, etwa über den Online-Summit, den Newsletter und verschiedene Social-Media-Kanäle. Dabei haben wir beim Newsletter deutlich mehr Abonnentinnen als auf den Social-Media-Plattformen.

Clara Mehringer: Um noch einmal kurz auf das einzugehen, was du gerade gesagt hast: Wenn du sagst, dass so viele Menschen immer wieder an den Online-Summits oder diesen Online-Formaten teilnehmen, was für Menschen sind das? Warum, denkst du, nehmen sie daran teil? Sie müssen ja einen Grund haben, warum sie das spannend finden und mitmachen wollen. Wie nimmst du das wahr?

Elisabeth Rohrmoser: Ich glaube, was die Leute daran spannend finden, ist, dass das Format nicht nur kopflastiges Wissen vermittelt, sondern auch eine persönliche Verbindung zu den Interviewten entsteht. Martin und Hemmer gestalten das recht persönlich und bringen Themen ein, die sie besonders berühren oder ansprechen. Diese Berührbarkeit der Personen kommt sehr gut an, sowohl vom Team in den Kursen als auch von den Interviewpartner:innen. Besonders bei den Live-Trainings, wenn man sich persönlich trifft, bekommen wir oft die Rückmeldung, dass der direkte Kontakt und das Fragenstellen vor Ort eine ganz andere Qualität erzeugen. Das kommt aber auch online erstaunlich gut rüber, es entsteht eine Art Verbindung. Ich denke, das ist vielleicht ein Grundbedürfnis: der Wunsch nach Kontakt zu Menschen, die inspirierend wirken oder positive Impulse geben. Außerdem suchen viele Orientierung, weil die Welt sehr komplex ist. Dabei vertreten wir keine bestimmte Ideologie, sondern es geht grundsätzlich um positives Wirken und um Handlungsfähigkeit. Wir bieten eine breite Themenpalette an, während andere vielleicht stärker in spezielle Bereiche wie Trauma oder Erziehung gehen.

Clara Mehringer: Und um noch einmal darauf einzugehen: Nach welcher Art von Inspiration oder welchem Gefühl suchen die Menschen, die du gerade beschrieben hast?

Elisabeth Rohrmoser: Also, ich glaube, es ist schon so, dass da vielleicht eine Hoffnung gesucht wird oder so ein „Okay, er erzählt uns eine positive Geschichte“. Im Team sind wir immer wieder dran, ob wir jetzt eine Geschichte vom Kollaps erzählen, dass wir uns aufraffen müssen, weil alles gerade schwierig ist, oder ob wir eine Geschichte erzählen von „Wir schaffen das gemeinsam“. Da sind wir intern auch in einem Prozess. Was die Leute als Inspiration erwarten, glaube ich, ist vor allem Beziehung,

dieser Kontakt, diese Menschlichkeit, so dieses Authentische – jemand versucht etwas, scheitert vielleicht auch mal dabei und probiert dann etwas anderes aus.

Clara Mehringer: Ja, sehr spannend. Wir haben jetzt auf die Chancen geschaut und welche Möglichkeiten es gibt, das Thema breiter zu verankern. Um auch in die andere Richtung zu blicken: Welche Barrieren oder Herausforderungen erlebst du beziehungsweise ihr dabei, das Thema breiter zu verankern oder eure Angebote an mehr Menschen zu kommunizieren?

Elisabeth Rohmoser: Also, was in den Kursen immer wieder Barrieren sind, ist, dass die Menschen oft zu sehr in ihre schwierigen Themen hineinfallen und sich dadurch bremsen. Es gelingt nur langsam, diese Ausrichtung oder den Bewusstseinswandel breiter in die Gesellschaft zu tragen. Beim Summit messen wir nicht wirklich, was das mit den Leuten macht. Zwar schicken wir Umfragen aus, aber der Kontakt bleibt eher gering. In den Kursen merken wir, dass manche Teilnehmende sehr bedürftig sind, auch psychische Krisen spielen eine Rolle. Deshalb fragen wir mittlerweile vor Kursen ab, wie stabil jemand sein muss, um teilnehmen zu können – es gibt quasi Kontraindikationen. Dieses zu tiefe Hineinkippen in negative Emotionen innerhalb der Transformation ist definitiv ein Hindernis. Wenn der Fokus zu sehr auf der emotionalen Bearbeitung des Einzelnen liegt, kann etwas verloren gehen, und das nimmt auch im Seminar viel Raum ein. Das ist etwas, das mir auffällt. Gleichzeitig haben wir mittlerweile sehr kompetente Hosting-Teams, die das gut begleiten. Was wir kaum haben, sind Shitstorms oder heftige Konflikte – das passiert sehr selten. Wir schaffen es meistens, eine positive Kurskultur zu etablieren. Das ist eher eine Chance oder ein Nebenprodukt, dass in fast jedem Kurs ein soziales Feld entsteht, in dem sich die Menschen zugehörig fühlen. Dieses Zugehörigkeitsgefühl, das durch das Hosting und die Gruppe entsteht, ist vermutlich das größte Geschenk, das die Teilnehmenden bekommen – ein Verbundenheitsnarrativ, das sagt: Du bist nicht allein. Das passiert teils ganz bewusst, teils einfach durch die Gruppendynamik und das Hosting.

Clara Mehringer: Danke! Hast du noch was, was du hinzufügen möchtest, was dir noch wichtig ist?

Elisabeth Rohrmoser: Mir ist noch eingefallen, dass sich das vielleicht so zusammenfassen lässt: Die persönliche Stabilität nimmt in der aktuellen Zeit, besonders in den letzten Jahren, oft ab oder Menschen werden stärker umgeworfen – so wie wir es auch bei anderen Teilnehmenden beobachten. Ich glaube, das ist auch eine Voraussetzung: Man fühlt sich instabil, sucht Orientierung und kommt dann vielleicht so zu uns. Gleichzeitig ist es für die Gruppe auch eine Herausforderung, wenn einzelne sehr instabil werden. Und was mir zum Skalieren grade noch einfällt, ist das wir seit einiger Zeit mehr auf Kooperationen mit anderen Organisationen, die sich ihrerseits für persönliche und gesellschaftliche Transformation – zum Beispiel Be the Change Stiftung, Schweisfurth Stiftung, Mehr Demokratie, Community Action Network – sowie Netzwerken zur Verbreitung, wie zum Beispiel Ecosystem of Change, setzen.

Clara Mehringer: Herzlichen Dank für deine Zeit!

Elisabeth Rohrmoser: Danke auch und alles Gute fürs Schreiben!