Leibniz Association

Economic and Spatial Development, Democratic Participation and Social Integration

Section B “Economic and Social Sciences, Spatial Sciences”

01 Introduction

04 Main topics

- Sustainable economic development, functioning markets and institutions
- Ensuring social participation, reducing social inequality and poverty risks, increasing educational and labor market opportunities
- Strengthening social cohesion through the democratic shaping of regulatory and media systems
- Sustainable development of spatial structures, urbanized societies and their built environment
- Overcoming environmental risks, strengthening climate and resource protection, dealing with the consequences of climate change and the loss of biodiversity
- Resilience in the face of crises and conflicts
- Sustainable design of the digital economy and governance as well as a networked society including its communication structures
- Securing the world‘s food supply and global interdependencies and regional integration

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Introduction

The development of sustainable economies and the promotion of social, spatial and economic development to create resilient societies are central concerns of the institutes in Section B "Economic and Social Sciences, Spatial Sciences" of the Leibniz Association. Climate change, biodiversity loss, demographic and technological change and the restructuring of the world order pose major challenges in this context. Section B, in collaboration with various disciplines, develops fundamental knowledge and identifies solutions to meet these challenges and enable people to live a life worth living in the present and in the future within planetary boundaries. The interrelated consideration of economic, ecological and social aspects in research and the transfer of knowledge to politics and society as a whole are at the forefront of this work.

The section combines excellent research with high-quality scientific infrastructures. These collect, process, provide and analyse data, develop methods and secure and make knowledge available.

Section B pays particular attention to the interaction between science and society in the research process as well as to knowledge transfer, understood as an exchange between science and the non-academic world. This exchange refers not only to the communication of scientific findings to relevant stakeholders, but also to the reception of impulses from these stakeholders, including the integration of socially generated issues into research projects and cooperation in e.g. transdisciplinary projects. Relevant stakeholders can be found in the fields of politics and business, the media, civil society interest groups and the general public at national and international level. All of the section's institutes are in constant dialog with the relevant stakeholders and provide insights into the design of political, economic, social and ecological processes and systems in Germany, Europe and worldwide.

The institutes in Section B conduct research both within and across their disciplinary focuses. They value the competition of ideas and the plurality of their research approaches as important elements of scientific quality assurance and as a prerequisite for solving complex problems and developing relevant answers to major societal challenges.

The central topics are:

- Sustainable economic growth, functioning markets and institutions;

- Ensuring social participation, reducing social inequality and poverty risks, increasing educational and labor market opportunities;
- Strengthening social cohesion through the democratic design of regulatory and media systems;
- Sustainable development of spatial structures, urbanized societies and their built environment;
- Managing environmental risks, strengthening climate and resource protection, dealing with the consequences of climate change and the loss of biodiversity;
- Resilience in the face of crises and conflicts;
- Sustainable design of the digital economy and governance as well as of an interconnected society including its communication structures;
- Securing the world's food supply and global interdependencies and regional integration.

In order to develop integrated contributions to these research topics, the members network both within the section and across sections in research networks and research alliances. They currently play a leading role in the Leibniz research networks **Knowledge for Sustainable Development, LeibnizData, Environmental Crisis – Crisis Environments, Earth & Societies and R – Spatial Knowledge for Society and the Environment** as well as the research networks **Educational Potentials** and **Infections**.

In the Leibniz ScienceCampi format, the institutes work with other partners, particularly universities, to conduct focused research in the respective subject area. There are currently five Leibniz ScienceCampi in the section: the **Berlin Centre for Consumer Policies, Eastern Europe – Global Area, Challenges in Healthcare,** the **Kiel Centre for Globalization and MannheimTaxation**.

The Section's institutions are also very active in the Leibniz Labs format for promoting transfer in civil society, politics and business – leading in the Systemic Sustainability and Upheavals and Transformations Labs as well as in a project for inter- and transdisciplinary excellence that networks the Labs.

Sustainable economic development, functioning markets and institutions

Economic development is facing unprecedented global challenges: Putting the brakes on climate change while at the same time adapting, restructuring energy supply systems, stability of global interdependencies in the face of pandemics, wars and territorial conflicts, but also inflation, digitalization and demographic change are just some of the keywords here. This also means that economic policy must be adapted and redesigned accordingly, in Europe and in the industrialized nations of other continents as well as in emerging countries. It is also a challenge for transition and developing countries to shape their economic growth and integration into the global economy in a sustainable way.

The Leibniz Institutes in Section B research such transformation processes. For example, they contribute to the debate on the reform of the regulatory framework in the eurozone and other economies. They discuss issues of tax and financial policy at national, European and international level, as well as how to deal with inflation. They develop proposals for solutions to consolidate national and European budgets. The Leibniz Science Campus **MannheimTaxation**, for example, con-tributes to a better understanding of the steering effect of taxes with its wide-ranging interdisci-plinary research. The institutes analyze productivity and innovation potential in various econom-ic sectors. For example, they focus on the role of the financial sector or the significance of knowledge accumulation and structural dynamics for the development of real economic growth processes.

Well-functioning markets and institutions as well as innovations are key drivers of growth and therefore important prerequisites for the welfare of societies. The section‘s studies are therefore dedicated to the functionality, coordination and regulation of markets, including issues relating to the structure of competition, value chains and trade relations. They offer approaches for identifying growth drivers and making market mechanisms more efficient, not least from the perspective of consumers. The studies identify the causes of barriers to innovation or market failure. On this basis, the institutes develop options for action and regulations to prevent undesirable developments. The institutes evaluate political interventions in market and trading activities, particularly in the labor, financial and commodity markets, such as the energy and food industry markets.

Ensuring social participation, reducing social inequality and poverty risks, increasing educational and labor market opportunities

Issues of social inequality, the fight against poverty, the distribution of income and wealth and the integration of refugees are at the center of political discussions at national, European and global level. The Leibniz Institutes in the section provide insights into the causes and the societal, social and economic consequences of poverty.

The scientists research the structure of income and wealth distribution. They identify political options for action, which are incorporated into the Federal Government's Poverty and Wealth Report, for example. They also analyze education, labour market, media and health policy strategies for sustainable social development. The latter is the focus, for example, of the Leibniz ScienceCampus' **challenges in the healthcare sector in regions with declining populations and ageing populations.** The institutes also evaluate political measures to combat poverty and rising income and wealth inequality at an international level.

In addition, the section provides extensive data sets for further scientific use, including within the framework of research data centers accredited by the German Council for Social and Economic Data (RatSWD). One

example is the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP), which has been collecting data on income, employment, education and health from 30,000 people in Germany for 40 years as a repeat study. Equally important are the repeated surveys on the attitudes and behavior of the population in Germany (ALLBUS, since 1980), Europe (ESS, since 2002) and worldwide (ISSP, since 1985). In future, these traditional data offerings will be supplemented by new types of data, for example from social media, online platforms or mobile devices.

The acceleration of technological and demographic change is making human capital an increasingly important factor in securing prosperity and a fairer distribution of income and wealth. This is why institutes in the section are conducting research into educational decisions, educational processes and educational success, for example in the Leibniz Research Alliance on **Educational Potential**. As members of the international consortium, researchers from the section have played a key role in shaping the study design of the "Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies" (PIAAC) – a PISA study for adults – and have already conducted the study in Germany on several occasions.

Strengthening social cohesion through the democratic shaping of regulatory and media systems

For some years now, a fundamental structural change has been taking place in society that threatens to impair cohesion. The issue of the digitalization of communication and participation pro-cesses plays a central role in this. Section B institutes contribute to a better understanding of how this change is taking place and make proposals on how regulatory systems can be designed to shape this change in the interests of society. This can only be done on an interdisciplinary basis. Communication science, economics, computer science, law and other disciplines work closely together. It is about the changes in the creation and distribution of content, its use and impact and its moderation and the increasing automation in all these areas.

The national and international networking of the institutes supports research as well as the opportunity to provide effective advice. For example, there is cooperation with the Research Institute for Social Cohesion (FGZ), which is funded by the BMBF. The institutes not only research traditional media – which is still of great importance for socialization and opinion formation – but also interaction and communication on social media platforms. Phenomena such as "harmful content" (disinformation, hate speech) are also investigated across platforms, new methods and agile research formats are tested, theoretical concepts are developed and proposals for the application of specific regulations such as the EU's Digital Services Act (DSA) are drawn up. The collaborations also extend beyond Section B, for example when it comes to the historical development of structures or their significance for sustainable development.

Sustainable development of spatial structures, urbanized societies and their built environment

Comprehensive economic and technological change (especially digitalization), the spread of urban lifestyles in late and post-industrial societies and the ecological crises of the present are placing new demands on spatial development. More and more people around the world are living in cities, while rural and peripheral areas are partially emptying out. Economic and cultural activities and the influx of national and international migrants, as well as environmental problems and social conflicts, are becoming more concentrated in urban centers. In many small and medium-sized towns, on the other hand, migration, shrinkage and decay are key challenges. Cities and regions are therefore focal points of intense socio-political conflict. They face the major challenge of managing social integration and reducing socio-spatial polarization – not least in order to counteract populist tendencies in politics – while at the same time driving forward ecological and economic structural change.

The future prospects of cities and regions are therefore an important focus of research in this section. Socio-political objectives aim to establish sustainable forms of housing, living and working in urban and rural areas. However, this requires a comprehensive transformation of spatial structures, including the building fabric and infrastructure, open spaces and public areas, and in particular the governance of cities and regions. Leibniz Institutes therefore analyze social, ecological, economic and structural aspects of spatial developments in Germany, Europe and worldwide. In view of the relative inertia of spatial structures and processes and the requirements of accelerated sustainability transformations, researchers are paying particular attention to the possibilities and limits of collective control. In particular, the Leibniz Research Network **Spatial Knowledge for Society and the Environment – Leibniz R identifies** spatial options for action and contributes to anchoring spatial knowledge more broadly in society and politics and making it more usable.

Overcoming environmental risks, strengthening climate and resource protection, dealing with the consequences of climate change and the loss of biodiversity

Global climate and environmental change are key challenges for humanity in the 21st century. The burning of fossil fuels, large-scale deforestation and intensive agriculture are major causes of global warming. In conjunction with land use change, overexploitation and pollution, global biodiversity is also dwindling. This poses considerable risks, particularly for food security, water supply and public health, as well as threats from increasing extreme weather events in many parts of the world.

With their research, the Section's institutes contribute to evidence-based advice on sustainability and resilience-oriented policies. What (economic) consequences can be expected as a result of climate change and biodiversity loss? What management approaches and instruments are available for dealing with environmental risks, climate change, resource scarcity and biodiversity loss? And how can they be made more efficient locally, nationally and globally?

The section develops suitable strategies and solutions that enable societies in the global South, for example, to better adapt to rapidly changing local environmental conditions. These include, for example, systems for improved land use management, climate insurance, emissions trading and the more efficient use of renewable biological energy sources.

In addition, the scientists are researching the energy consumption and demand behavior of companies and private households. In this context, they collect extensive data, for example a long-term panel data set on the energy consumption of private households. In turn, they make this information available to the general research community via their data centers.

Resilience in the face of crises and conflicts

There are numerous (territorial) conflicts and armed conflicts around the globe on an unprecedented scale, with all their humanitarian, social, economic and political consequences. Africa, the Middle East and Asia, but also Ukraine as a European state, are heavily affected. In a globalized world, societies and states are so complexly intertwined that the need for coordinated political action is constantly growing, especially in the face of advancing climate change.

Researchers at institutes in Section B are dedicated to these challenges. For example, they investigate territorial claims of conflict parties, possibilities for peaceful solutions and humanitarian support as well as migration as a result of conflicts and environmental changes. They also look at the effectiveness of sanctions, their impact on national economies and the stability of international relations. They also examine the strengthening of economies such as China and India and the consequences for the previously "western" oriented system of order.

In the Leibniz Research Network **Environmental Crisis – Crisis Environments**, 15 Leibniz Institutes are working together in an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary manner, with significant participation from the Section's institutes, to better understand the mechanisms, interactions and dynamics of crises. The research network brings together expertise from the social sciences, humanities and natural sciences. This generates practical knowledge that can help to better assess current threats and recognize crisis-like developments at an early stage.

Sustainable design of the digital economy and governance as well as a networked society including its communication structures

Digitalization and artificial intelligence are influencing numerous areas of life and spheres of the knowledge society in many different ways. Whether sustainable "smart" cities, the global division of labour in industrial production or intelligent research and decision-making systems based on algorithms and big data: digitized information and information provided by means of digital technology are the basis for decision-making and action in business and politics – and are omnipresent in everyday life.

Researchers at the Leibniz Institutes in the section analyze the potentials, challenges and risks associated with the digital transformation. They advise policymakers on the regulation of data use and data protection and are, for example, members of the **Council for Social and Economic Data** set up by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, the Federal Government's **Expert Commission on Research and Innovation** (EFI) and the Federal Chancellor's **Council for the Future**.

The institutes contribute to sustainable solutions in three major areas of social development:

- **Social control and regulation**

Digitalization is giving rise to new policy areas and changing social options for action at local and global level. Institutes in the section are analyzing how big data, for example, can contribute to the development of new national and international regulations. Another research topic is the trend towards transferring responsibility for decision-making processes to smart machines using artificial intelligence. For example, researchers are investigating the implications of implementing the EU's AI Act.

- **Digitalization of work and production**

The digitalization of work and production is so advanced that more and more people are interacting with machines in their day-to-day work. Leibniz Institutes are researching the social consequences, for example the opportunities for social participation through mobile forms of work and virtualized work processes.

- **Change in social communication**

Social processes are significantly influenced by communication. This area is currently characterized by a high rate of change, keywords are the importance of social media and search engines as well as phenomena such as disinformation or online interaction risks (such as cyberbullying, hate speech), increasing automation (generative AI, “robo journalism”) and the resulting changes in media use. Section B institutes contribute to the understanding of this change, create a basis for decision-making for various stakeholders and develop management tools to meet the challenges of media change in the best possible way.

Securing the world‘s food supply and global interdependencies and regional integration

To date, international economic and social interdependencies have steadily increased. They often go hand in hand with the regional integration of economic and living spaces, which connect states and societies politically and economically more and more intensively. Global relationships offer opportunities for development, above all through the advantages of an international division of labor. However, they also harbor risks, for example if national interests and standards are not (or no longer) adequately taken into account. At the same time, there is a growing awareness of the fragility of global (supply) interdependencies and transportation routes.

Researchers at the Leibniz Institutes are looking for answers to globalization-related challenges. They ask about the consequences of structural, economic, social and cultural adaptation process-es and analyse the role of politics and institutions in a globalized world. Studies explore the potentials and risks that global and regional value chains offer for sustainable economic and social innovations. These potentials and the effects of (supra)regional cooperation and trade and investment agreements are topics of the Leibniz ScienceCampus **Kiel Centre for Globalization**.

The Leibniz ScienceCampus **Eastern Europe – Global Area** sets a spatial focus, examining the embedding of Eastern Europe in an increasingly globalizing world, for example through migration, multilateral economic relations, cultural exchange and in the course of political integration processes. At the same time, the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine is a striking caesura for the previous assumption of the validity of a rules-based international order in this region.

More than ever, the sustainable supply of sufficient and healthy food for the world’s population is a key challenge. Despite considerable successes, around 800 million people still suffer from malnutrition and hunger. In addition, another billion people lack essential nutrients. The countries of the global South are particularly affected. At the same time, there is an increasing tendency towards obesity not only in industrialized countries, but also in emerging economies. In this context, there is sometimes talk of the “triple burden of malnutrition”, a threefold burden of hunger, malnutrition and obesity. Studies predict that this situation will worsen by the middle of the 21st century, partly as a result of population growth, climate change and changes in eating habits.

The growing demand for food is accompanied by increasing pressure on local and global ecosystems, biogeochemical cycles, the climate, soils, water resources and marine systems as a result of food production. At the same time, there are considerable social problems within the agricultural and food sector, including poverty and exploitation. Accordingly, there is a considerable need to make agricultural and food systems more sustainable overall.

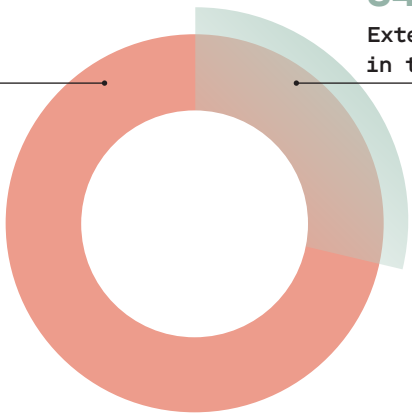
The institutes in Section B contribute to significant findings on the causes of malnutrition and hunger and on the economic and social consequences. For example, they investigate the development of food prices and their dependence on commodity prices. In addition, they offer strategies for solving the world food problem against the backdrop of changing ecosystems, the increasing digitalization of value chains and demographic change. They investigate how production and market potentials can be mobilized and how the sustainability and resilience of global and local agricultural and food systems can be improved in the face of limited resources and external shock and stress factors. This is one of the ways in which they contribute to the Leibniz Lab **Systemic Sustainability**.

The Section “Economic and Social Sciences, Spatial Sciences” in Figures

Last Update: December 2024

294 m €
Budget in total

84 m €
External funding in total



1.947 | 56 %
Women in total

3.500
Staff in total

The Section “Economic and Social Sciences, Spatial Sciences” in Figures

Last Update: December 2024

2.193
Researchers in total

1.053 | 48 %
Female researchers

534 | 24 %
International researchers

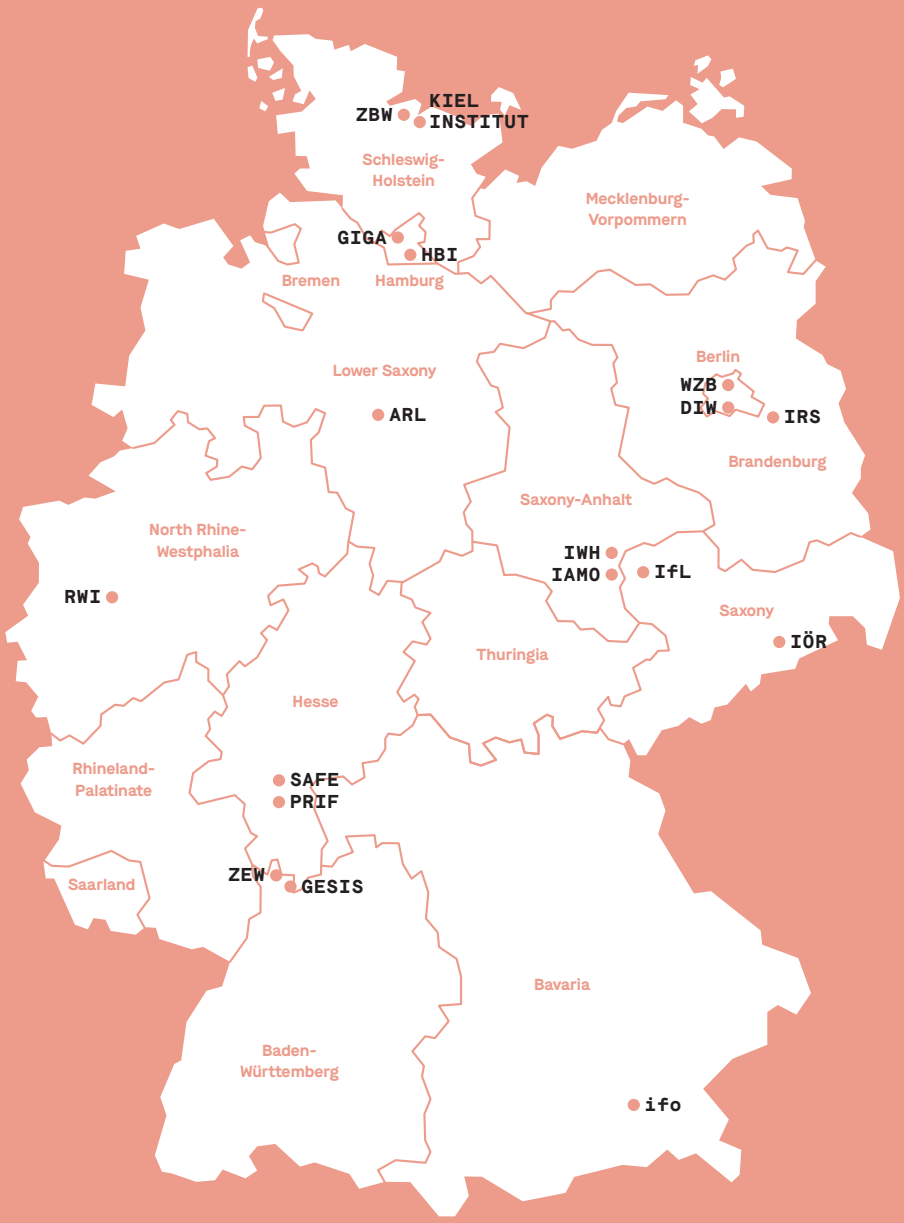
588
Doctoral researchers in total

248
Researchers in executive positions in total

295 | 50 %
Female doctoral researchers

95 | 38 %
Female researchers in executive positions

18 Leibniz Institutes of the Section “Economic and Social Sciences, Spatial Sciences”



BADEN-WÜRTTEMBERG

- **GESIS** GESIS – Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences, Mannheim and Cologne
- **ZEW** ZEW – Leibniz Centre for European Economic Research, Mannheim

BAVARIA

- **ifo** ifo Institute – Leibniz Institute for Economic Research at the University of Munich

BERLIN

- **DIW** German Institute for Economic Research Berlin
- **WZB** Berlin Social Science Center

BRANDENBURG

- **IRS** Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space, Erkner

HAMBURG

- **GIGA** German Institute for Global and Area Studies / Leibniz-Institut für Globale und Regionale Studien, Hamburg
- **HBI** Leibniz Institute for Media Research | Hans-Bredow-Institut, Hamburg

HESSE

- **PRIF** Peace Research Institute Frankfurt, Frankfurt on the Main
- **SAFE** Leibniz Institute for Financial Research SAFE, Frankfurt am Main

LOWER SAXONY

- **ARL** ARL – Academy for Territorial Development in the Leibniz Association, Hanover

NORTH RHINE-WESTPHALIA

- **RWI** RWI – Leibniz Institute for Economic Research, Essen

SAXONY

- **IfL** Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography, Leipzig
- **IÖR** Leibniz Institute of Ecological Urban and Regional Development (IOER), Dresden

SAXONY-ANHALT

- **IAMO** Leibniz Institute of Agricultural Development in Transition Economies, Halle
- **IWH** Halle Institute for Economic Research (IWH) – Member of the Leibniz Association

SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN

- **KIEL INSTITUT** Kiel Institute for the World Economy
- **ZBW** ZBW – Leibniz Information Centre for Economics, Kiel and Hamburg

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