PK 060
PROMOTIONSKOLLEG

Gefördert durch die

Hans Böckler Stiftung
Mitbestimmung · Forschung · Stipendien

Universität Vechta
University of Vechta

VISTRA
Vechta Institute of Sustainability Transformation in Rural Areas

Call for applications for scholarships

(Application deadline: November 2, 2026)

at the doctoral college (PK 060)

"Justice dimensions of sustainability-oriented transformation processes in rural areas" (PK 060)

With funds from the Hans Böckler Foundation, **up to 3 PhD scholarships** will be awarded within the doctoral college "Justice Dimensions of Sustainability-Oriented Transformation Processes in Rural Areas" (PK 060) at the University of Vechta, **starting in June 2027 at the earliest**. Within the University of Vechta, the doctoral college is affiliated with the Vechta Institute of Sustainability Transformation in Rural Areas (VISTRA).

Sustainability transformations have become a central topic of scientific, social and political discourse in recent years. However, as dynamic processes of change, transformations are also accompanied by social impacts that are not perceived as positive by all those affected (including "transformation pains"). Thus, they raise questions of social justice that have so far been little understood, empirically researched, and reflected upon. The aim of the doctoral program is to make a significant contribution to closing this gap. The doctoral college places special emphasis on processes in rural areas. In order to examine the different sustainability-oriented transformation processes, their different facets, aspects and concepts of justice, the doctoral program pursues a comparative case study approach across individual dissertations that explicitly includes quantitative and mixed-methods approaches.

Examples of dissertation topics include, but are not limited to

- Transformation of the energy sector: Energy affordability and new (in)equity relations between urban and rural areas;
- Spatial justice: Equitable livelihoods, social places and local resilience;
- Uncertainty about the "right" ethical standard (normative uncertainty) as a practical and theoretical problem in designing just transformations;
- The role of risk and uncertainty for perceived (in)justice in transformation processes
- Justice issues in socio-technical transition and innovation processes (e.g. in digitalization, bio-economy);

- Justice-relevant effects of supraregional nature and climate protection policies (e.g. accounting for urban-rural relations, between the global North and South));
- Gender justice in the design of transformation processes;
- The role of trade unions in shaping just sustainability transformations;
- etc.

The doctoral program is jointly directed by Prof. Dr. John-Oliver Engler and Prof. Dr. Jana Zscheischler. Other participating researchers at the University of Vechta are Prof. Dr. Paula Bögel and Prof. Dr. Karl Martin Born.

The doctoral college offers thematic and methodological workshops for the scholarship holders and supports the collaboration in a moderating and motivating way. Furthermore, it features a network of national and international partners to complement, support and deepen its expertise (including Leuphana University Lüneburg, Leibniz Center for Agricultural Landscape Research, Basque Center for Climate Change, Lund University, Copernicus Institute/Utrecht University, University of Vermont).

We welcome applications from fields relevant to the topics of the doctoral program, such as human geography, social sciences, applied ethics, economics, sustainability science or psychology. Both qualitative and quantitative research approaches are welcome and supported; applications with a quantitative or mixed-methods design are explicitly encouraged. Good German and English language skills are required for the application (at least level B2 for German, C1 for English); the doctoral thesis can be written in English.
Further inquiries related to the program may be addressed to any of the researchers involved with the doctoral college.

Application and selection process:

Application deadline for scholarships is **November 2, 2026**

Promising applicants will be supported by the academic leadership of the doctoral program in revising and adapting their exposé, if necessary, to fit the topic and the requirements of the program. Please contact Prof. Dr. Jana Zscheischler (jana.zscheischler@uni-vechta.de) and Prof. Dr. John Oliver Engler (john-oliver.engler@uni-vechta.de) in advance to discuss your projects. The exposé will then undergo academic review.

Fellowships begin between June and September 2027 and are awarded for a maximum of three years. This standard funding period may be extended in justified cases. Doctoral students receive a stipend of €1,650 (€1,550 basic stipend and €100 lump sum for research costs). In addition, a health insurance contribution of up to €100 and, if applicable, a family allowance may be paid.
Doctoral fellowship decisions are made according to BMBF guidelines and HBS selection criteria.

Please apply with the required documents and an exposé (max. 10 pages) in which the planned project is outlined and classified in the research program of the doctoral college (https://www.uni-vechta.de/vistra/promotionskolleg). You can find information on how to prepare the synopsis here. Please submit your application exclusively via the Hans Böckler Foundation's online application portal. The winners of the scholarship will be announced in May 2027.

If you have any questions about the application process, please contact bewerbung@boeckler.de.

For content-related questions regarding the doctoral program, please contact the postdoc of the college via the following email address: judith-maria.maruschke@uni-vechta.de.