



Centre for Rural Development (SLE)

SLE CURRICULUM 1 - 2022

SLE curriculum development and considerations for tandem research

Side product 1 of the SLE Joint International Research Project (JIRP):
“Agroecology and Rural Development: Acting in the Global North—for and with the Global South”

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Preface

The Centre for Rural Development (SLE) belongs to the Albrecht Daniel Thaer Institute for Agriculture and Horticulture Sciences, a department of the Humboldt-University of Berlin. As a postgraduate study program, the SLE prepares students for work in the field of international development cooperation, connecting both studies and profession, i.e., science and practice. Alongside SLE studies, the SLE further engages in development cooperation through its other departments, SLE research, SLE training, and SLE advisory services.

The SLE postgraduate study programme involves six months application-oriented research cooperation between development organisations such as the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), the KfW Development Bank, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) or non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and are a core component of the study programme. As a rule, these research projects are worked on by teams of five SLE graduates with an experienced team leader and methodologically and professionally supported by SLE staff (backstopping).

In 2021, the SLE carried out four study projects, three of them in North-, East and Southern Africa and one in Europe, i.e. Germany and Austria. In the African countries, research teams investigated questions of the sustainability of value chains in Zambia (milk and peanut) and in Uganda (fish and potato) within the scope and funding of the Green Innovation Centres co-financed by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). A third study group worked on the resilience of the national food safety system of Tunisia, co-funded by the Federal Institute for Risk Assessment. A fourth team investigated the linkages between agroecology and rural development in Europe through case studies in Germany and Austria, thereby exploring possible long-distance effects of action in the Global North on the Global South.

The latter has been considered a pilot project, because development research carried out in Europe, Germany and Austria, remains a novelty. Looking into agroecology and rural development while emphasizing global environmental justice and the responsibility of the Global North was prompted by the aim to enable more action locally while at the same

time considering distant effects, reducing negative or augmenting positive outcomes. Lessons learned from the project are utilized to inform curriculum development and organisation of collaborative international research undertakings.

Introduction

January 2022 marked the start of the 60th year of the SLE Postgraduate Pro-gramme "International Cooperation for Sustainable Development". For six decades the Centre for Rural Development (SLE) has played a major role in preparing postgraduates on their way into this professional field, equipping the respective cohorts of SLE Postgraduate Students with theoretical, methodological, and practical experience on topics of sustainable development in an international context. Since the creation of the SLE, continuous efforts to further develop programme content and methodology have been both, the answer to and the driver for, change in development cooperation. This also applies to the other activity of the SLE, which are training, consulting, and research.

All of SLE's activity fields – studies, training, research, and advisory services – are connected with each other and embedded in the overall learning environment of the institute that traditionally evolved around rural development issues in the Global South¹. However, global context and demands are changing. At the end of 2021, the SLE set itself a transformation agenda which also includes the consideration of the Global North in development and research strategies, something not the least also required by the 2030 Agenda. Here, development objectives equally apply to the Global North, most notably in terms of CO₂ emission reduction but also social objectives such as the development-oriented regulation of international trade and prevailing inequalities in its societies.

SLE's work will include challenges and approaches in the transitional sphere between the Global South and the Global North, dealing with inter-regional trade and comprehensive global value chains, work on refugee and migration projects, and - in line with the global sustainability agenda - also analyse rural development problems in OECD countries, e.g. in European countries. While the SLE retains its focus on rural areas, as well as its multi-level approach, it now regards all issues in a more systemic way based on the four dimensions (economic, social, political and ecological). This has become summarised in three

¹ Global South here combines the 'classic' developing countries, fragile states, transition economy countries and emerging countries, while SLE places special emphasis on marginalised groups.

integrated dimensions or thematic areas. These are now called: 1. Ecosystems and Nutrition, 2. Socio-Ecological Economy, 3. Governance and Participation. Reference is made to the existing transformation discourse, especially in regard to strategies for international development cooperation and to the generation of knowledge and related collaboration with partners (co-creation of knowledge).²

The postgraduate programme curriculum must co-evolve with the overall changing context and SLE's adapted agenda, supporting the graduate studies participants to adequately address these novel concerns and related challenges utilizing appropriate concepts, approaches and methodologies. Furthermore, the BMZ also requested that an output of the pilot project "Agroecology and Rural Development: Acting in the Global South – with the Global North" are suggestions for curriculum development at SLE in line with these evolving demands.

Curriculum development for the SLE

This year's pilot project "Agroecology and Rural Development: Acting in the Global North with (and for) the Global South" primarily investigated agroecology and rural development within European farming contexts. Inspired by the theme "acting in the Global North for and with the Global South" it addressed important global sustainability concerns and integrated the principles of justice and equity into the research questions. It therefore offered the first opportunity to explore what is needed in terms of theoretical training and field work preparation of the students, to directly engage with development obligations in the Global North.

Connected to this new study orientation, the research team reflected on their 12 months post-graduate studies to provide recommendations for the further development of the SLE study programme and to suggest a SLE curriculum, especially based on experience and lessons learned during the research process. While SLE graduates usually travel to classical overseas locations in rural Asia, Africa, or Latin America, for the first time, the team carried out their research project in Europe – Germany and Austria. Furthermore, the team was composed of the five SLE Graduates – this year of German and Nigerian background – and five young professionals from dif-

ferent African countries (Nigeria, Kenya, Benin, and Zimbabwe) who were invited to come to Germany to add their expertise and perspective into the research process. This would not only augment the expertise in the team and provide additional training opportunity to young African professionals, but more importantly safeguard the research process from a Euro-centric perspective.

We systematically reflect our team experience of the project field research and aim to provide useful insights, addressing those concerned with the quality and impact of SLE's study programme, training, and research, besides others, the study programme commission, the directorate, as well as the advisory board. We use SLE's overall strategy, internal workshop outcomes and the present structure of the postgraduate programme as reference and starting point. While the recommendations are primarily addressed at SLE, we believe our suggestions can also serve as useful orientation for other research and training institutes contemplating their engagement in international development and sustainability studies.

We start by emphasizing our conviction that the study project "Agroecology and Rural Development: Acting in the Global North with the Global South" we carried out, and from which this reflection emerges, is a first flagship initiative for the practical implementation of the aspects of transformative and relational development, elaborated in terms of its role and importance in the internal steering workshop in November 2021, and now central to the SLE Strategy 2023.

Addressing transformation objectives and relational development thinking

Global development is increasingly being addressed in relational thinking. Under the SDG framework, all countries of the world are part of a global development agenda. The concept of international development cooperation is changing with principles of justice and equity, and the responsibility of the Global North for the climate crisis, being advocated more directly in the North and the South. A relational thinking integrates knowledge about the consequences of colonial-ism, international trade imbalances, or reciprocally negative feedback loops between the

² Neubert, Susanne und Markus Hanisch et al. (2022): Die Transformationsagenda des SLE (the Transformation Agenda of the SLE). unpublished document, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

³ Towards the end of the research phase the postgraduate study team decided to change "Acting in the Global North with and for the Global South" to "Acting in the Global North with the Global South" in recognition that attempts of one part of the world to act in favour of another always requires foremost a direct collaborative approach.

world's regions, linked to unbridled consumption of natural resources. The SLE is integrating these concerns, besides others, with a focus on the relatively new science of telecoupling which was picked in our research project as an element of your conceptual framework.

However, we realized that telecoupling added a considerable amount of complexity into our research design that we eventually have not been able to fully tackle. Besides the need to integrate the science of telecoupling as a subject into the curriculum (lined out in more detail below), it will be necessary to explore effects and impact of telecoupled systems at different locations, for example, along a global supply chain and its adjacent spheres of influence in question. Ideally this should be approached with respective research partners in the Global South who should already be involved in developing the respective research proposal.

Illustrated in the Table below, SLE has incorporated relational development thinking into the Curriculum and made important new additions for the study year 2022. One example is the one-day course on Development action in the Global North. To incorporate additional topics of global environmental justice into the teaching programme, we recommend to discuss the German Sustainability Strategy within the context of the international sustainability frameworks and existing global environmental rules and regulations. A clear understanding of the letter principles and the actions to be derived from them conveys an awareness of global responsibility. Reckoning with national off-shoot indicators (to be found in the long version of the German Sustainability Strategy, The Federal Government, 2021b) provide the real basis for highlighting erroneous developments in the Global North (here: Germany) and related externalities. These considerations have also been helpful for us to reflect misconstrued ideas of "advanced states" easily expressed in paternalistic development behaviour.

Besides the practical approach to development research, and related training about theory, there are implications for how students require to be equipped in their methodological know-how. Telecoupling is a powerful science demonstrating what effects actions in the Global North have elsewhere in the world and what interventions can be used to mitigate them, emphasising besides others, the role of governance. We have thus asked ourselves how to reconcile the teaching of relational development already

addressed with the practical phase and the method training.

During the Action- and decision-oriented Research (ADR) preparatory phase, great emphasis is placed on Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) methods. These remain mandatory. However, the investigation of telecoupling effects (or interconnections linked to understanding relational developments) between the Global North and the Global South will be a crosscutting research theme that requires additional methods and skills which should probably become integrated into the ADR approach.

Considerations for curriculum adaptations

In the Table below, the course content of the year 2022 is presented. Important aspects of the transformation agenda already find consideration here. We high-light these with the two columns at the right side of the table, where courses integrating North-South relational development thinking and systems thinking are marked off.

In our curriculum suggestion presented in chapter 2.3. below, we address the three SLE studies elements – theory, practice, and methods skills - and recommend, in addition to North-South development relations, a teaching module that integrates the German sustainability agenda, experience-based learning in local contexts in the Global North (on-sight excursions), plus the introduction of how action in the Global North affects the Global South applying the theoretical framing of telecoupling. This is important to better understand the causalities of international and national policies, and action in local contexts and to bring to light the direct linkages between these.

Creative elements will be useful to allow students to be innovative in their formulation of possibilities for more sustainable action in the Global North. Already in the first phase of the course (until June), which is based on theories and methods, the possibilities of using additional experiential learning should be more exploited through a stronger integration of day excursions into the areas surrounding Berlin. This has already started and can still be expanded.

SLE post-graduate study course content 2022	Transformational and systems thinking	North-South/relational thinking
Module 1: Rural development and the great transformation		
1.1 Sustainable development policy and theory		
▪ Corona and its consequences for international cooperation		✓
▪ Concepts of development policy in transition	✓	✓
▪ Anti-racist training for work in international cooperation		✓
▪ Empowerment Training for Black Indig People of Color Participants		✓
▪ Development Policy Discussion Days: Organisation/implementation		
▪ Development action in the Global North		✓
▪ Excursion to the North-South Relationship in Berlin		✓
1.2 Climate-resilient land use and food systems		
▪ Climate protection/adaptation (example "große Landwende")	✓	
▪ Transformation of food systems as a mirror of land use	✓	
▪ Disaster Risk Management in International Cooperation		
▪ Excursion on Rural Development and Ecological Transformation	✓	
1.3 Socio-ecological management		
▪ Economic systems and their importance for socio-ecological change		
▪ Instruments to promote sustainable value chains		
▪ Instruments for social management and safeguarding		
▪ Social entrepreneurship and pro-poor innovation		
1.4 Social inclusion, cohesion, and peacekeeping		
▪ Governance, empowerment and social inclusion	✓	✓
▪ Population displacement and migration		✓
▪ Conflict transformation and peacebuilding		
▪ Linking Relief Rehabilitation and Development (LRRD), Resilience		
Module 2: Competences: Communication, Teamwork, Working Techniques		
▪ Working effectively in teams		
▪ Participatory Methods/Virtual Collaboration/ Workshop Design		
▪ Process and events moderation		
▪ Participatory methods for research		
▪ Extension, incl. excursion for extension practice		
▪ Conflict management and strategic negotiation		
▪ Team building and conflict management for int. research projects		
▪ Safety training for int. research project teams		
▪ Writing and editing in a team		

Table 1: Programme course content 2022 and its linkages to transformative and North-South themes

Study project output: proposed curriculum

Goal of the teaching module

Course participants understand the architecture and functioning of the German sustainability agenda, can place it in international sustainability regimes and are familiar with key actors at different levels. Remote effects of action in the Global North can be identified by means of telecoupling and used to show how to address governance gaps. In addition to North–South interdependencies, urban-rural connections and interdependencies become apparent through experiential learning elements.

Work material and mandatory reading

The Federal Government (2021a). The German Sustainable Development Strategy. Update 2021. Summary Version. Retrieved on December 20, 2021 from: <https://www.bundesregierung.de/resource/blob/998440/1941044/81190075aa2808adaeb73fa08b6e9bea/2021-07-09-kurzpapier-n-englisch-data.pdf?download=1>

The Federal Government (2021b). The German Sustainable Development Strategy. Update 2021. Retrieved on December 20, 2021 from: <https://www.bundesregierung.de/resource/blob/974430/1940716/6a4acfo41217d39bac6a81cce971381f/2021-07-26-gsds-en-data.pdf?download=1>

Hull, V. & J. Liu (2018). Telecoupling: A new frontier for global sustainability. *Ecology and Society* 23(4), Art. 41. <https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-10494-230441>

Structure of the teaching module

Day 1: Familiarise with the German Sustainable Development Strategy

1. The trainer (or a participant) gives a general introduction about the German Sustainable Development Strategy, explaining how it fits into global sustainability regimes.
2. Discussion: Is Germany a developing country? If so, in which respects and why?
3. Small groups work on one principle of the sustainability strategy each and present their understanding of it in plenary.

4. In small groups, the description of the working methods of the key players in sustainability architecture (The Federal Government, 2021a, p. 13) is prepared in a division of labour and presented to the plenary (two, maximum three players per small group).

5. Discussion and evaluation of the working method specified in the German Sustainability Strategy (embedding in international frameworks, stakeholder participation, federal structure).

Day 2: Experience-based learning through short excursions

1. Excursion to the Weltacker Berlin. Participants learn about the real scarcity of land as a resource, conflicts of land use, planetary boundaries and individual consumer behaviour. The excursion thus serves to contextualise land use issues and how sustainability can be achieved. Furthermore, the learning effect aims at understanding and reflecting on the individual with his or her actions in global contexts. [Appointment with Weltacker necessary, experience shows that June is the best time to visit. The group arranges its own travel. Travelling by public transport is free of charge with the semester ticket. Homepage Weltacker: <https://www.2000m2.eu/de/worum-gehts/>]

2. Independent reading of the article by Hull, V. & J. Liu (2018). Telecoupling: A new frontier for global sustainability.

Day 3: Understanding and mitigating far-distance effects through telecoupling

1. Based on the contents learned on the previous days, course participants work in small groups to develop causal mechanisms that show how actions in the Global North trigger negative externalities in the Global South. (This requires extensive reading of existing telecoupling/critical analysis of international trade; possibly a preselection will have to be made available as a reading list)

2. Taking into account the principles of the German Sustainable Development Strategy and with the help of the multidimensional, multi-level approach, the small groups will develop feasible measures to curb these externalities.

First, the causal mechanisms will be presented in

plenary, followed by work on ideas for solutions, and finally presentation and discussion of the solution strategies.

Requirements

- Instructor who is familiar with the German Sustainable Development Strategy, its actors and the concept of telecoupling. If this cannot be guaranteed, it is possible to hire one instructor each for day 1 and 2 and one for day 3.
- Space to work together in small groups (in person or digitally).
- Early arrangement of an appointment with Weltacker. Instructor for this day must be in Berlin.

To not only cover the relational development between the Global North and the Global South in the teaching programme, but to also convey that development gaps between cities and rural areas are becoming significantly larger - both in the Global North and in the Global South - we recommend that this is included in the teaching programme in an experience-based manner via day excursions. We suggest for example a day excursion to rural areas of Brandenburg, connected to simple tasks such as ad-hoc interviews with the local population to explore their viewpoints on life in rural Germany, historic changes, challenges and hopes for the future. In addition, the organic village of Brodowin, whose products from organic farming are primarily consumed by Berlin's urban society, is another good example for exploring urban-rural connections in a reflective mode. The aim is to show that cities are dependent on rural regions, but at the same time the SDG indicators for rural areas are clearly behind those for urban areas (cf. SDG Portal). Urban-rural development disparities and their manifestation can be shown in this example for the metropolitan region of Berlin but can equally be used as a reference for discussion in contexts in the Global South.

Additionally, we ask is it would be possible to directly anchor action in the Global North with its impacts on the Global South more succinctly in the transformation agenda of the SLE, by integrating the telecoupling concept into the de-sign of the multi-level approach of the transformation areas (then in donut representation)?

To make it more accessible to external parties (including applicants to postgraduate studies) what working on transformation scenarios at SLE will

entail, we believe that the theoretical framing is essential and should be presented as soon as possible. Exploratory expert interviews with researcher(s) at SLE are arranged. In addition, it might be useful to hold a two-day workshop with all those responsible at SLE to address this together for maximum coherence, making sure possibly divergent viewpoint find reconciliation early in the process. Other experts in transformation research and experts in the field of curricula and structural development might be consulted. We are aware that this represents an additional effort for all involved. At the same time, we recognise this necessity, as this is a directional and profile-setting matter at SLE, through which the Institute will define itself over several years.

We see non-racist behaviour as non-negotiable in international cooperation. Unfortunately, many racist viewpoints are still present but unconsciously carried forward because they are deeply entrenched in western culture and society. We are therefore in favour of making the course a standard offer for everyone joining the SLE each year. This includes the post-graduate cohort, permanent employees at SLE from teaching, research and training, as well as the team leaders and other longer term consultants.

We believe there is important need for development projects in the Global North, within continuing efforts to shape the evolution of a contemporary understanding of international development cooperation. For the implementation of such projects, we strongly suggest having the collaborating postgraduate re-searchers from the Global South join the team in Berlin as soon as possible, but latest from day one of the project activity. This is necessary to ensure that both SLE staff and visiting scholars can take on responsibility and are equally involved in the project. The same applies to the final phase of the project. The early departure in the middle of the project duration causes a loss of agency in the over-all project.

We envision and hope for a future, where the SLE post-graduate programme has the mandate and financial means to become an in-depth development study opportunity for post-graduate from around the world.

Required tasks:

- Applying for funding for the visiting scholars from the Global South for the complete project phase (six months).
- Early selection of the visiting scholars before the

Viewpoints of the African researchers	Viewpoints of the SLE postgraduate students
OPPORTUNITIES	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Working in a mixed team opens one's perspective and helps to see things with a different eye. ▪ The diversity of the team is highly appreciated. ▪ The research experience strengthened our confidence in collaborating with researchers from other world regions. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SLE is a pioneer in this kind of tandem research approach that made it possible for guest researchers to come despite the Covid-19 pandemic. ▪ It was good that the selection process has been made through SLE and not through partner organisations as this allowed for young researchers without strong established local networks to participate. ▪ It is enriching to come to Germany and interact and exchange with professionals in the same field of expertise (i. e. with interviewees during field research). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Interviewees showed interest in the expertise and background of the guest researchers. Some of them reflected their answers in a way that allowed them to make connections to the Global South. ▪ SLE postgraduate participants were continuously pushed towards setting the observations and interviews into context in order to explain certain behaviours or statements of interviewees to the guest researchers. This helps 1) to contextualise the research and 2) to reflect upon previous research and working experiences in the Global South. ▪ The guest researchers importantly complemented the SLEers with their expertise.
CHALLENGES	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There is the challenge of having a complete team for only two months of research. Joining two months after the project has started and having to leave two months before the report is supposed to be handed in is not satisfactory. It also does not encourage ownership among the guest researchers. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There is a tandem inequality: Tandems need to adjust and adapt at a very quick pace to the research matter, the methods and the culture of their counterparts in Germany. This inhibits guest researchers to fully exploit their capacities and take ownership for the project. ▪ Language can be a barrier to fully understanding the matter and proactively engaging in the research, especially when the translators / interpreters are not familiar with the research project. ▪ Some of the methodological questions have only been able to be asked in the very end. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The expertise of the guest researchers could only partly be fully exploited which is due to organisational challenges of the research project (see tandem inequality expressed by guest researchers). ▪ There are mixed opinions with regards to the selection process of the guest researchers. Some highlight that the postgraduates gained some first-hand experiences in selecting colleagues whilst others see in the selection process a form of hierarchy.

Table 2: Experiences of the research team during the collaboration period

start of the project. The trade-off of this is that the SLE postgraduate team (probably) cannot be involved in the selection process. Team leaders and backstoppers then have to take over the selection process.

- Adjusting the PRA/PLA trainings of the AEU phase to the additional international participants – the collaborating co-researchers – and then taught in English (French/Spanish).
- Adjusting team building workshop to the additional persons and in English (French/Spanish). Add component of working (and living) together in intercultural teams (i. e. decide upon translation forms, allocation of roles in case of interest in joint leisure activities).
- Provision of rooms in which a group of ten persons (plus team leader) can work together, plus the three additional rooms for the overseas projects taking place in the Global South.

Suggestions for SLE's Tandem Research Approaches

During the two-and-a-half-month field research and analysis phase in Germany and Austria, there was a continuous exchange between guest researchers and SLE postgraduates. Experiences and knowledge were created through interaction in specific contexts – i. e., interview situations, discussions in working groups, experiences in the field. Therefore, we speak of an inter-creation of knowledge. In the Table below, results from an open exchange of experiences of the research team are summarized.

Recommendations for future SLE tandem research and curriculum

The experiences that the research team made inform the recommendations for SLE tandem research in the Global North. They read as follows:

1. We recommend addressing “tandem inequality” in two ways:
 - SLE postgraduate programme: Having a mixed team for the whole post-graduate study programme (if necessary additional funding opportunities might have to be sought out). International collaboration is needed in the future. For SLE to stay a cadre forge for young professionals, it needs to guarantee that eye-to-eye level international collaboration is taking place during the postgraduate programme.
 - Tandem research project: Collaborating with

tandem researchers for the entire project cycle, i. e. starting with a joint project conceptualisation and finishing with the hand in of the report. For tandem researchers to familiarise with SLE-methods and culture, we recommend introductory workshops.

2. In order for the team to be complete when the project starts, we recommend the selection process of the tandem researchers to start earlier (and therefore be executed by the team leader and the SLE study coordinator).

3. Translation is key in order to enable all researchers to fully engage in and contribute to the project matter. We recommend including a training on translation in the SLE postgraduate training. This should encompass aspects of interview translation and interpretation of what has been mentioned. The alternative option that has been mentioned was investing in professional interpreters who accompany the research team during field research. Yet it has been recognised that this is an additional cost.

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