

# SUMMER 2021

# NEWSLETTER

## Welcome to the MEG Newsletter

Editor

Since the last MEG newsletter in the fall of 2019, life has drastically changed for many of us. From early 2020 onwards, remote learning and socially distanced meet-ups have become the norm and for many, our bedrooms have become our new office spaces.

As a member of MEG's newest generation and a first-time editor of the newsletter, I was concerned that I might struggle to gather a sufficient number of submissions to make this edition a success. I wondered how I would be able to connect with the MEG network, having barely met any of the staff in-person, let alone alumni! However, as I'm sure the readers will see from the wonderful array of content within this edition, I needn't have worried. From welcoming our newest member of staff to learning about the inspiring work of MEG graduates, from sports and socials to theatre and poetry; the call for submissions was more than answered. The quality and range of the articles is testament to the strength of the MEG community. This newsletter truly gives readers an insight into the ever-vibrant activities which have continued to take place despite the challenges which have faced us all.

That said, I would like to thank all the contributors for their excellent pieces and I wish all our readers an enjoyable experience!



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# IN CONVERSATION WITH DR. NIKO SCHÄPKE

## A WARM WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST MEMBER OF STAFF

**Interview by Christy Williams  
(MEG16)**

### **Introduction**

*Recently, I sat down for a conversation with Dr. Niko Schöpke, the newest member of the MEG teaching staff. Alongside his research, Niko will be teaching on two MEG modules: Global Environmental Politics and Research Design. I wanted to find out a bit more about the newest member of the team and welcome him to the MEG community.*

*C = Christy*

*N = Niko*

**C: Niko, thank you for joining me today and taking some time out of your busy schedule. I thought by way of introducing you to the wider MEG community we could do a short question and answer session. So, let's jump straight into it: can you introduce yourself by giving us some background on your career path to this point?**

N: First of all thanks for having me on as an 'interviewee'. I'm happy to introduce myself to the MEGgies.

I'm Niko Schöpke, I joined the faculty some 10 months ago as an Assistant Professor for Environmental Governance. I was previously working as a post-doc at Chalmers University in Gothenburg, Sweden for approximately two and a half years. I did my PhD in 2018 at Leuphana University in the area of trans-disciplinary sustainability research and before that I was working for three or four years as 'Project Coordinator' at Leuphana in the area of real-world labs, or transdisciplinary research. Before that I had positions at the Eberswalde University for Sustainable Development, which is North of Berlin and an institute dedicated to sustainability.

I also worked at the Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research in Leipzig and originally, I graduated with a combined degree – a Bachelor and a





Master – in Economics and in Environmental sciences from Leuphana University... so a couple of years ago now!

**C: And given your current position, what was it that made you decide to choose Freiburg in the first place?**

N: Well, there a few different angles to come at that question. One is the family situation – I have a list of places where I'm allowed to apply, with my wife. Gothenburg was on it, where I was lucky enough to get my previous position, and the question was: 'where to go to next?', because I couldn't stay in Sweden forever! Freiburg was actually right at the top of that list, so I saw the position in Freiburg and I applied.

It was also geographically also one of the attractive places to live and also, being an 'Assistant Professor' was actually the position I was hoping to be able to pursue next after Sweden – so that fit well.

Another thing was that I also had contacts, not with Heiner (Schanz), but with Michael Pregernig. He was leading one of the real world laboratories that

I was accompanying when I was still at Leuphana University – so I already had some contact with the faculty. I was also doing lectures at the MEG so ten years ago... I think, during my PhD work – so I already had some contact with the MEGgies and saw: 'ok this is an inspiring and critical bunch of students'.



Image: Dr. Niko Schäpke, from Sustainability and Environmental Governance website

So there was contacts, but also the topic of my new position felt nice and Heiner Schanz, my current boss, said that I would have room to develop my own portfolio and find out what I would want to be doing and that felt very attractive for me. So it was a combination of different aspects.





**C: Alongside continuing your research in Freiburg you will, of course, be teaching. Do you consider teaching to be an important part of your job as in addition to the research aspects of academia, and what do you personally get out of the teaching side of things?**

N: Well, of course it's important. When I look at how much time I need in order to do it well it is definitely something which takes a share of my working time! But that sounds a bit like "ok I have to do teaching"... Freiburg and the MEG is the first time I've had the opportunity to dedicate a lot of time to teaching. That is something I was a bit afraid of beforehand but then I noticed that it's actually really inspiring, really insightful and very beneficial to be in such intensive contact with students and to try and

work things out together. I like that, so definitely I get a lot out of teaching. It's also something where I'm confronted with questions that I don't normally spend so much time on. For example on the Research Design module, it gives me the opportunity to really spend time on important questions on research methods and to try out solutions in multiple versions with different students. That teaches me a lot on how to actually do research, so my research also benefits from doing teaching.

**C: You mentioned earlier that you already had some contact with the MEG programme, but what do you see as the key strengths of the programme?**

N: Well as a new member, it's quite assess the whole programme. But



from my own experience, I think the close and intense interactions with students. There is on the one critical but on the other very productive and pragmatic way in which students interact with each other and with us as lecturers. It's a very fruitful environment for working with students and I see that as a core strength.

That's not to pay lip service to 'nice' students but it's actually what I notice as a key strength. I think that has to do with the small group sizes, the 'compressed' modules of three weeks and it has to do with the selected bunch of people that are together; who are very motivated and who really want to do achieve good studies and

have good outcomes. That is what I see so far as a key strength.

**C: This next question is my final one and I wanted to touch on a different subject. One term I've heard quite often in recent times and which I think resonates with some of my fellow students, is 'ecological grief'. I'd be very interested to hear whether you personally feel positive or negative about the outlooks for our planet with regard to ecological crisis and for environmental sustainability in general?**

N: To be honest, this is something I think about and struggle with quite often.



Image: Dr. Niko Schöpke chatting with Christy via Zoom





I have both positive and negative feelings and that is something which has been getting stronger recently – the impression that some of the urgency surrounding the crisis has begun to be matched with action, with policies, with interesting statements from political actors, from companies and from all around. So it feels like there is something starting to move, which is great... it “only” took 50 years but it does seem like there is

Here there are many things which are heavily worrying me... it's an important phase to live in.

**C: So with that I think we can wrap up, but first is there anything else you would like to add?**

N: I would just add that I'm honoured to be in Freiburg and to be part of the MEG and this community and I hope that moving forward we can all find

***"It “only” took 50 years but it does seem like there is something which is starting more intensely now... On the other side of the coin I would say that it's definitely a decisive decade that we are in."***

something which is starting more intensely now.

On the other side of the coin I would say that it's definitely a decisive decade that we are in. Whether you are convinced that there are ‘tipping points’ and afterwards everything will just be collapsing or you think of it more in linear terms in that it's getting worse but we can also reverse, it's still a decisive decade in terms of what kind of decisions we are taking now and in which direction we set the path.

possibilities to further harness the potential that the MEG programme has for the future.

**C: Niko, on that note I'd like to thank you again for joining me today and for your honest and insightful answers. I'm sure I can speak on behalf of my fellow MEGgies in welcoming you to the programme and to this community!**

N: Thank you very much!

# BUILDING COMMUNITY DESPITE (OR BECAUSE OF?) CORONA

## INTRODUCING THE MEG16 SPIRIT COMMITTEE

**Text by Sophia McRae & Braoin MacLauchlan (MEG16s)**

Continuing class discussions over coffee, pulling long hours co-working in the library, taking excursions around Europe, and of course, the parties. For obvious reasons, these cornerstones of the “MEG Experience” haven’t been available to the 16th generation cohort. But when the proverbial doors closed, innovative opportunities for connection shone through the cracks in our Zoom windows. The MEG16 Spirit Committee was formed from a series of early conversations about how we can build community despite remote learning, support each other’s success in and out of the MEG program, and create additional educational and professional opportunities.

Now a few months later, our committee of about 12 meets weekly to see how we can make the most of our time together. Our first program was the “MEGgie Walkabouts”, for which Freiburg-based students are

paired off each week to get to know each other over a corona-safe stroll or coffee date.



Image: MEG16s enjoy one of the many Spirit Committee Events

paired off each week to get to know each other over a corona-safe stroll or coffee date. Initially meant to ensure that no one was isolated in our new home, we “went global” by springtime to include everyone who wasn’t in town with virtual hangs. This program has been so successful that we have also launched the “intergenerational walkabouts” with older MEGs (please get in touch if you’re interested!).

We have also offered opportunities for professional development, such as a





networking workshop with Djahane Banoo from our Governance Research and Skills module. In fact, her lessons inspired two other programs, a spinoff “Getting the Most out of your Studies” workshop and a “Running Partners” program, in which peer support groups of 3-4 can discuss their personal and professional trajectories through MEG. We also started hosting Parisian-style Salons, where students meet online every module to discuss course content (and push beyond it), exchange new theories, and learn from each other.

Beyond encouraging each other in our academic endeavors, the Spirit Committee has been dedicated to building a community care network from day one. Waves of ecological grief, coronavirus lockdowns, and Zoom fatigue inspired our first workshop in Listening Exchanges; a powerful tool to facilitate healthy emotional release and mutual support.

Beyond encouraging each other in our academic endeavors, the Spirit Committee has been dedicated to building a community care network from day one. Waves of ecological grief, coronavirus lockdowns, and Zoom fatigue inspired our first workshop in Listening Exchanges; a powerful tool to facilitate healthy emotional release and mutual support. Similarly, our student representatives facilitated a collective Reflection Session to digest the first semester in Zoom University.



Image: Official logo of the Spirit Committee - the MEGpie





EG alumna Emily Gerger then kicked off our second semester with a fantastic workshop in Nonviolent Communication, which we hope will be the start of a series of Skills Sharing workshops (where we can learn everything from fermentation to swing dance!). Perhaps our silliest program was our “First Semester Retrospective Awards Show,” where we celebrated superlative moments with awards like “most likely to break the wheels of the Capitalist machine and effectively

resolve Climate Change,” and games like a MEG Merchandise design contest (the MEGpie is our official mascot now). Stay tuned for our sustainable textiles tie-dye party....

From supporting each other to nurturing our intellectual curiosity, the Spirit Committee has found the silver lining in a challenging situation. And when it’s all over, you can just imagine the parties we’ll have.



Image: Poster from the Spirit Committee MEG16 awards show



# COMPOST COMMUNITY 2021

## THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A NEW HERDERBAU COMPOST FACILITY

**Text by Margaux Savin, Marina Bauer & Sofie Hovmand (MEG14s)**

Coffee grounds, vegetable peels, and care are ingredients for a healthy compost process. We would like to invite the MEG community to join the establishment of a compost facility at Herderbau that strives to decompose 2020 ideas and turn them into 2021 actions. The compost project is a spin-off from the last European Week for Waste Reduction, where a student participated in the 'Call for Ideas' with the initiative 'Compost at the Campus Technical Faculty' to reduce waste at our University. The idea was awarded 3rd place by the jury made up of local representatives.

A recent workshop on the compost initiative scoped out the project form. Thus, the Department of Environmental Protection is ready to set up compost facilities at not only the Technical Faculty but also the Faculty of Environment and Natural Resources. As continuous input materials and care are needed for this project, we are looking for well-rooted 'compost officers' amongst the MEG community's staff and students. If you hold access to a kitchen in Herderbau

or the will to collect bio-waste from your WG, we would love to hear from you. Other tasks linked to the project include monitoring the decomposing process in collaboration with the Department of Environmental Protection and spreading the compost word to enrich the community.

We look forward to decomposing with you.

**Contact information:**

[ewwr.freiburg@mail.com](mailto:ewwr.freiburg@mail.com) "compost community" in the subject line

**Project information:**

<https://www.nachhaltige.uni-freiburg.de/en>

**Next European Week for Waste Reduction:** 20 - 28 November 21



Image: Logo designed by Lara Quaas



# SWABIAN SUSTAINABILITY

## MY EXPERIENCE AS A LANDRATSAMT SUSTAINABILITY MANAGER

**Text by Christoph Pfister (MEG10)**

I was born in the Swabian city of Stuttgart and have a 400 years family lineage in Swabia - nonetheless, at the first day of my job as a sustainability manager in a Swabian county administration (Landratsamt), I felt culturally deeply confused.

The head of our department told me: "Herr Pfischderer, mir hier im Schwobenländle machet Hännedäpperle in Richtung Nachhaltigkeit." ("Mr. Pfisterer, we folks in the land of the Swabians walk like chickens into the direction of sustainability"). What does that mean?? I later found out that this wasn't a self-critical moment, but a strategic order to our sustainability management team.

As a Meggie, I felt well trained to work in inter-cultural/national contexts, under time pressure, with scientific scrutiny. However, I did not feel prepared for this: a largely homogeneous social group in which political opinions tended to outweigh scientific facts, and where I had to wait weeks to get an appointment with

leaders to present project ideas.

My task: develop sustainability goals and indicators for the regional administration, an organization with 1.400 and 20 departments, responsible for a wide range of public policies that affect 280.000 lives. So, I talked to each of the 20 heads of department about goals and performance measurements and received answers I did not wish for:

*"we do not have any data on environmental pollution in our region"; "the agricultural and ecological systems in our region are not doing so well...but this has nothing to do with our administrative performance, so we should not show this in a sustainability report"; "goals? I do not care about goals, I work according to laws!"*

When I met a public lawyer, he smirked at me "Ahh, there is the wellness team!" Sustainability management was largely seen as nice to have. At that time, I did not even feel like walking like a chicken into the direction of sustainability, it felt like sitting on an egg – the egg of status quo.



My profession turned into an “inside job”: I wanted to nourish an organizational culture that allows people to connect their world view with their professional duties, so that public policy flows from understanding and their hearts towards a vision. I introduced check-ins at work meetings to include personal reflection at the work place (how am I here today? What is my intention today?), I started mentoring our interns based on theory U (by Otto Scharmer), gave sustainability classes to apprentices

the direction of sustainability. We connected!, and suddenly a window of communication opened in which professional responsibilities and personal world views were allowed to meet.

At the end of my 1.5 years at the administration, my team was able to present a first draft of goals, indicators and measures to the regional council. The report was still lacking indicators that I considered high-priority as well as clear goals. It was a start.



Images: strategy day of our team. Here: “warming the back”, writing down positive qualities onto the back of our colleagues. Such methods helped create an atmosphere of reflection and mutual support

and talked again to administrative leaders on goals and indicators: “what do you want to achieve with your work? And how would you measure the performance of your policies?” I wanted them to be deeply convinced about what they do and how we walk together like a bunch of chickens into

For me it was time to say goodbye to the “chicken” and go back to Freiburg. I am now co-creating a sustainability certificate program for students from all disciplines at our university – with the vision that the leaders of tomorrow will act from their understanding and convictions.

# DENSE SERVICES - LIBERIA

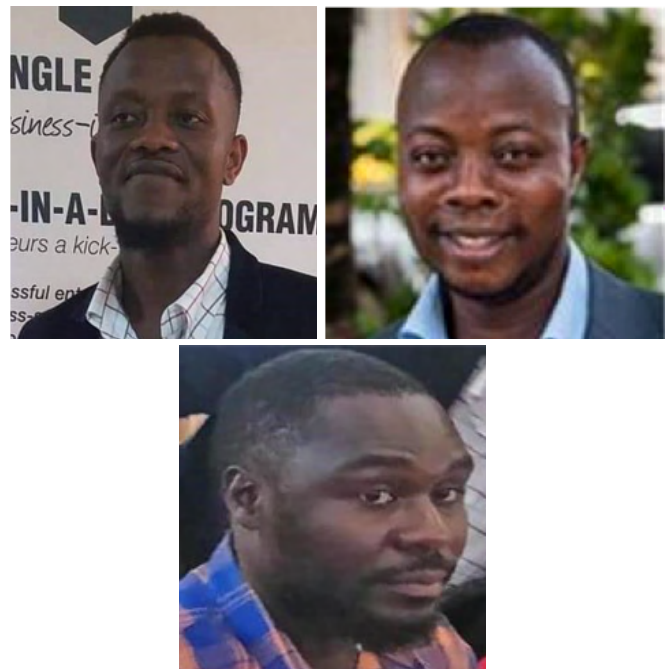
## WORKING WITH CHANGE MAKERS TO STRENGTHEN LIBERIAN GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

**Text and images by David K. Sinatue  
(MEG11)**

Liberia has seen major transformations in the last few years in its governance and development systems. Over time, development institutions including government, civil society and the private sector have struggled to provide effective and efficient responses to national issues such as health, economic instability, climate change, justice reform and the rule of law, gender equality, and more. In response to these shortcomings, different forms of multi-level stakeholder governance initiatives have been instituted which combine the efforts of both public and private actors, including civil society. While this has increased the effectiveness of different actors involved in the process, their efforts remained patchy.

Concerted efforts using collaborative approaches is the only way forward if the story must change. Different professional backgrounds but with one destination in mind have led David K. Sinatue, Francis Egu Lansana and

Anthony N. Nagbe to establish Dense Services in the quest to strengthen Liberia's socio-economic growth and development.



Images: Top left - David (MEG11), top right - Francis, bottom - Anthony

David K. Sinatue - is a MEG11. His work has focused on advancing global knowledge and institutional assessment of gender roles in Natural Resource Management. He has helped to strengthen local livelihoods activities, promoted social inclusion





and participatory decision-making in forest governance and rural development planning in forest dependent communities in Central Asia. His work also includes analysing the effectiveness of global timber legality regimes to strengthen forest governance in Africa. Similarly, he has conducted research, supported programme activities and strategies on wealth and income generation and employment creation for local communities in Uganda, East Africa.

In 1997, Francis returned to Liberia from Guinea where he was a refugee during Liberia's prolonged civil war. He found that many of his peers had dropped out of school and faced huge social challenges. Before the war, Francis wanted to be a medical doctor, but soon realised he could be an agent of social change; so he studied social sciences with the hope of supporting peace in Liberia. Francis is an experienced programme development specialist and former fellow at the Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation. He has proven professional experience in government, civil society and the private sectors. He is skilled in Sustainable Development, International Relations, Policy Analysis, Research and Data Analysis, Training, Staff Development, and quality control.

Anthony N. Nagbe is a Kenyan trained Marketing and Business Development Specialist with vast experience in monitoring and evaluation of marketing programs. He designs marketing research strategies to analyse basic market trends to help corporations or businesses define new approaches. Anthony is also a motivational speaker, a coach and mentor who has helped many young people accomplished their goals while defining their futures.

### **About us**

Dense Services is a business management consulting and development services provider that develops and grows SMEs in Liberia. Dense Services is dedicated to providing full range of corporate services that revolve around accountancy, bookkeeping, payroll, tax and VAT compliance, internal and external auditing, investment planning and financial reporting for individuals and companies. Dense Services' mission is to ensure that SMEs grow and thrive in Liberia.



Image: Dense Services logo



## **Programmes**

Dense Services seeks to support agriculture and rural development and build strong synergies amongst a wide range of actors. By strengthening economic growth and development via networks, the organisation aims to improve quality of life and living conditions. In addition, Dense Services supports human resource development and builds institutional capacity. We run a Training, Research and Development Centre (DTRDC) that offers advanced certificate courses in many areas of business & resource management, governance, finance and more.

Dense Services is the founder of the Consortium of more than 10 CSOs in Liberia. It focuses on Security and Governance, Rule of Law, Social Justice and Human Rights. The goal of the initiative is to contribute to strengthening democratic participation, promoting dialogue and engagements to help citizens' voices to be heard.

## **Sustaining the national dream**

No one single approach is 'the best' in development discourses. Hence, Dense Services collaborates with local partners to work collectively and find solutions to the common challenges that confront all.

## **Capacity support to partners**


At Dense Services, we work with innovative change-makers to help them realise their dreams.

On March 29, 1979, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) heads of state and Government approved the protocol relating to the free movement of persons, residence and establishment in Senegal, Dakar.

As a critical pathway to achieving the Protocol's primary objectives, the International Organization on Migration (IOM) supported the National Coalition of Civil Society Organizations of Liberia (NACCSOL) to 'increase public knowledge and citizens understanding about the ECOWAS Protocol on Migration and Free Movement in Liberia and to build a network of CSOs to enhance issues relating to migration and child trafficking'

As the ECOWAS Protocols are less known among CSOs, Dense Services conducted an end of project quality review in the form of monitoring and evaluation. This assessed how the project has enhance citizens understanding about the ECOWAS Protocol on Migration and Free Movement in Liberia and to also





determine the impact CSOs are making relating to migration and child trafficking programs.

### **Knowledge Management and Organisational Development**

Sustainability and Organisational Management are key skills that most national organisations, including CSOs, lacked in Liberia. In order to sustain the gains made, local institution capacity building is one of the reasons that led to the establishment of Dense Services. Dense Services is focusing on bridging knowledge gaps by supporting capacity enhancement and national development.

As a way of providing capacity support, Dense Services conducted a number of Sustainability Trainings for many institutions (e.g. the National Coalition of Civil Society Organisations of Liberia, Universal Empowerment Mission, the National Association of Foreign Exchange Bureau of Liberia, the Centre for Criminal Justice Research and Education, CSOs



Image: Dense Services training in action

Networks, amongst others). The trainings aimed to strengthen CSOs Network members' capacity in sustainability planning and management

### **SMEs as engine for economic growth and development**

The SMEs and Micro-finance sectors are critical to driving Liberia's economic growth and development. Dense Services recognises the need for standardised local economic and financial policies, as well as programmes and actions that foster economic growth and development. Hence, we have been working closely with the public and private sectors to strengthen key monetary policies and programmes. These include foreign exchange services, to enhance micro-finance performance and practices and to establish a nationwide programs that support government revenue generation and also addressed financial challenges such as terrorist finance, money laundering, fraud etc.

### **Access to education for all**

Dense Services strongly believes that a knowledge-based society contributes to improving the quality of life and standard of living. Therefore, over the years, we have been working with key policy makers in the education sector to address education and innovation



challenges to devise ways by which education in Liberia will contribute to economic growth and social development. With more than 60 percent of the Liberian population below the age of 35, preparing a competent generation of emerging leaders who will lead major changes is critical. Dense Services mobilizes education support through organising scholarship seminars for young Liberians to expand access to quality education for all. The seminars create valuable access to

information on international higher education opportunities (e.g. undergraduate and graduate scholarships, fellowships, internships, volunteering, exchange programs and expanding networks). It provides a chance for emerging leaders to choose disciplines that are of special relevance to the social, political and economic development of Liberia.

For more information on Dense Services and their work, visit the website at: <http://denseservices.com/>



Image: 'Education for all' - a Dense Services seminar on educational opportunities for Liberians





# INSIGHTS INTO WATER USE EFFICIENCY

## WATER STEWARDSHIP AND COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE

**Text by Willow Sommer (MEG13)**

For my thesis research, I partnered with Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation to study two cases of their comprehensive WAPRO programme. This is a development cooperation initiative that uses multi-stakeholder collaboration to improve water use efficiency among small-holder farmers using a layered approach that employs market access, skills trainings, and policy dialogues across multiple countries.

I came to to the WAPRO programme through my interest in Water Stewardship, an approach to private engagement in improved water resources management, and ideally, in multi-stakeholder water governance. Criticisms of the approach are similar to those usually leveraged at public/NGO cooperation with private actors and largely hinge upon the risk of fringe, incremental improvements obscuring and legitimising an ultimately devastating system of global production. Although Water Stewardship is most often associated

with multi-national corporate actors, like Nestlé, Coca-Cola, and Apple, the approach is applied to a complex and diverse range of activities, and thus impacts actors both within and beyond corporations.

The case of WAPRO offered an interesting micro-level example where the grand claims and warnings of Water Stewardship could be examined for their impact experienced “on the ground”. The research I undertook for my MSc Thesis shows that to paint development agencies engagement with Water Stewardship as purely legitimisation of corporate production is an oversimplification meant to provoke indignation and invite oversight.

To deepen that oversight, I studied the levels of adaptive capacity achieved in two iterations of the WAPRO program, one in Tajikistan and one in Pakistan. Adaptive Capacity is a complex trait emergent from actor relations and institutions which is linked consistently to effective water governance across contexts. As an indicator, it is more



tangible than those economic or quantitative measures usually favoured in corporate engagement. This can be criticised, but it may also make it a more meaningful way to evaluate the full impact of corporate involvement.



Image: Willow  
Sommer (MEG13)

The thesis results indicate that the development projects designed through the Water Stewardship approach can indeed create meaningful progress in the difficult process of building relationships for collaborative water governance. With my research focused on learning, contextual fit and trust, it became clear that the economic opportunities and skills-trainings around improving water use behaviors in Tajikistan were well embedded in existing institutions (including farmer led Water User Associations). This centered around empowering the farmers by giving them a greater feeling of certainty towards the water supply they needed to secure their livelihoods and greater sense of trust in their institutions' management abilities. In Pakistan, the local private actors coordinated with

the public irrigation department responsible for their district, engaging farmers in a way that minimised overlap and deepening cross-stakeholder learning exchange in the field.

This increased exchange improves collaboration and relational capacities undoubtably contributing to adaptivity, however, it does not come without risks. Invoking economic arguments can incentivise, but it also risks prioritising economic rather than environmental or social considerations. This was suggested in the case of Pakistan, where the project featured stronger economic incentives through a contractual agreement between the farmers and rice export companies. This contract was effective in achieving the project objective, improving water-use efficiency. However, when examining the components of adaptive capacity, and relative to the Tajik case, less trust and empowerment was fostered among the farmers. This appeared to be related to the framing of the skills and to the strength of linkages to water governance institutions and process. When compared to the Tajik case, learning was achieved, in Pakistan but framed through "business case" argumentation, thus subtly sidelining intrinsic value in favour of profit-oriented logic.





***"...development projects designed through the Water Stewardship approach can indeed create meaningful progress in the difficult process of building relationships for collaborative water governance."***

The disillusionment aimed at Water Stewardship is better oriented towards our entire system of production: we are placing increasing stress on our natural resources for questionable motives, groundwater being one of many, and often chiefly for profit motives. This is especially questionable in countries where people face food or water insecurity. Yet in the absence of serious efforts to dismantle that system, we must improve the measures we have for incremental correction to its excesses. The results of my thesis research indicate that Water Stewardship can serve as one of these corrections, but only when applied with a particular attention to the needs and realities of the local context and its people. To do this, any Water Stewardship effort must be conducted with serious consideration to the local water governance context, with its many levels and complexities,

and considerations beyond only the economic dimension of sustainability.

The examples studied within the WAPRO program show that active attention to nuance in relationship building, fostering learning modes which empower those less powerful, and robust exit strategies which keep a comprehensive view of regional water resource needs, all contribute to building adaptive capacity among all actors involved. Criticism might focus on distinguishing those examples of corporate engagement that work towards humanised collaboration, and do not fall too easily into allowing the business case to overtake efforts development towards a more holistic sustainability.

*For more information regarding the WAPRO programme, visit the website [here](#)*



**Text by Dr. Cristina Espinosa (MEG4),  
Charlotte Gengenbach (MEG13) &  
Rafael Ponte (MEG15)**



In November 2020, the Environmental Movements and NGOs module aimed to critically explore the various roles played by organized civil society in environmental governance. MEGs from three generations were involved in delivering this module. They now share their experiences...

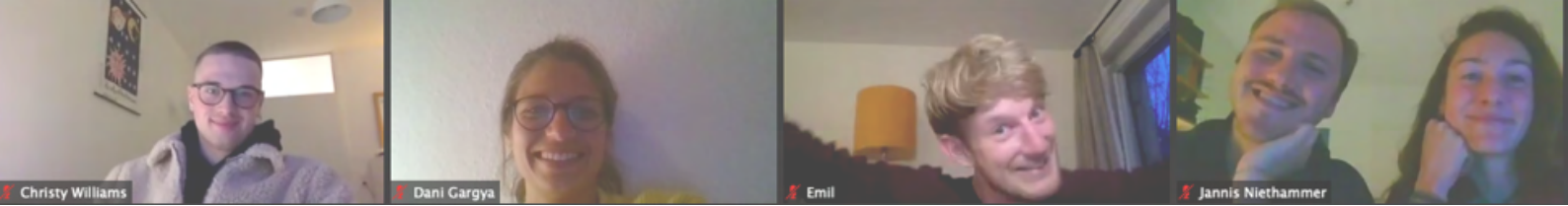
**Dr. Cristina Espinosa (MEG4) -  
Coordinator and Lecturer**

Due to the global pandemic, the academic year 2020/2021 was completely online. This meant that this elective, and other courses, had to be completely rethought. I used this as an

opportunity for trying out new didactic methods with elements of a 'flipped classroom' that included student-produced podcasts. The topics chosen by the students were very diverse and included, for example, the relationship between Greenpeace India and the Indian government, the framing strategies of peasant communities to protect their watershed against mining activities in Peru, and NGO diplomacy for traditional forest-related knowledge. Each podcast presented an empirical analysis anchored in social science theories and research methods.

The main goals of this activity were to help students reflect on and train a central skill for civil society actors involved in governance processes: the craft of storytelling. It further sought to encourage critical thinking and peer-to-peer learning. I felt these goals were met when, together and in our virtual classroom, we all attentively listened to each episode and then engaged in vibrant, passionate discussions about the roles organised civil society could and should play in shaping more sustainable and just futures.





### **MSc Charlotte Gengenbach (MEG13) - Teaching Assistant**

My main role as a teaching assistant consisted of supporting the students in designing their own case studies, which were later presented in the form of a podcast. As a recent MEG graduate, I found it extremely interesting to support students on their own learning journey and at the same time broaden my own teaching experience.

Our teaching team spent many hours and thoughts on choosing adequate, interactive methodologies and structuring the module in a fun and an energising way. While real-life MEG classes are known to involve many free-flowing discussions, lengthy conversations have to be avoided in online lectures. Nevertheless, in order to make the experience interactive and focused on the topic, visualisation is key - which is why we used different adequate technical tools, such as Google Jam Boards, Mentimeter, and Zoom Whiteboard.

In addition to thorough planning, we left time for breaks, energizers and small fun games in between. In the end, we were pleasantly surprised by the positive feedback given by the students, who highlighted the participatory, creative nature of the

module and our dedication to teaching. Working with Cristina and Rafael has been a real pleasure and I thank them both, along with all the students, for turning this module into a very interesting teaching and learning experience.

### **Rafael Ponte (MEG15) - Module Tutor**

The module was twice as special because I was given the chance to share what I know about podcasting and because it offered a different way of showing our results. We transformed our research into a script and then we recorded it. I believe it was a great opportunity to test ourselves in something quite unknown but gradually more and more used by research institutes or universities to reach a wider academic and non-academic audiences. Learning how to use sound editing softwares was challenging for some classmates but everybody came through and delivered such interesting podcasts based on their case studies. Perhaps this medium is one more way to create and share knowledge among fellow researchers and students.

Back in my home country, a professor told me that being creative is a must - especially in countries as complex and in need of solutions as the ones we might come from. Keep up the creative spirit everybody!



# BIOSPHERE 3

## FRAMING THE HERDERBAU COURTYARD

**Text and header image by Sofie  
Hovmand (MEG14)**

In the module Human Environment Interactions, students study how humans immerse in ecological systems around the world. The Herderbau environment remains an unexplored case even though the surroundings are vital for the academic staff and their day-to-day activities. As a current reconstruction is changing the physical conditions for research, teaching, and administration, the case draws our attention.

The inner courtyard of the Faculty of Environment and Natural Resources was constructed in 2011 to provide shelter and improve the energy performance of the building. The "Herder Hofüberdachung" belongs to a portfolio of the local architects, Böwer, Eith, and Murken, who work consciously with resource use and social responsibility. Their Herderbau design has indeed saved energy by trapping heat under the transparent glass construction. In doing so, the well-being of the staff working particularly in the fourth floor has been

compromised due to seasonal heat. Now, the reconstruction brings about change as the roof is lifted to let in air. The same breeze that sweeps through the offices brings us to Arizona to gain an international perspective on heated buildings.

The Earth system science research facility, Biosphere 2, was constructed in 1987 to mimic Earth's environment, Biosphere 1, and test the conditions for human survival in outer space. This prototype of an extra-terrestrial colony is placed in the subtropical climate of the Sonoran desert, which provides a sharp contrast to the temperate climate around the Black Forest. Biosphere 2 is - similarly to the inner courtyard - designed with a shell made of glass and steel. In the fall of 1993, eight researchers and 3080 animals and plant species were integrated into a self-sustaining system, where food, drinking water, and air circulated completely. In comparison, the biodiversity represented in the Herderbau courtyard is lower counting the academic staff and the four non-photosynthetic tree branches that



support the roof construction. Only by including office plants, pigeons, and academic dogs the numbers could possibly match up. Both environments, however, have adapted over time to accommodate a need for fresh air. The eight researchers at Biosphere 2 set out to live two years inside the airtight system. Though, faced with oxygen levels equivalent to those found in the altitude of Mount Kilimanjaro (5 895 m)

the Herderbau system has never been a fully closed. Some might claim that Herderbau is an 'academic bubble' but the link between such statement and the air quality is rather weak. Also, windows in the glass construction have regularly allowed air to enter the courtyard and only the corona restrictions have influenced the autonomy and office hours of the academic staff. Whether the



Image: from Corbis/Spiegel, Biosphere 2 under construction

after half a year, the conditions for human well-being were questioned. After another year and a mass extinction) the green house effect seriously endangered the lives of the researchers, which forced the management to call off the initial project and let in air. In comparison, the situation under the sealed roof construction at Herderbau is less severe. Even though the oxygen levels have never been systematically monitored, it is quite certain that no staff, animals, or plants have ever been endangered by the circulating courtyard air. One reason being that

reconstruction of the Herderbau courtyard improves the conditions for human environment interactions will be more certain after December this year, when the construction work ends. The above cases, however, have taught us that humans immerse not only in ecological systems but also in built environments. Richard Branson and the other readers can decide for themselves whether the environment of Biosphere 2 or Biosphere 3 (Herderbau) would provide them personally with most well being.

Sources

<https://www.spiegel.de/geschichte/projekt-biosphaere-2-a-947336.html> /

<https://www.bemv.de/projekt/herder-hofueberdachung>

# LACING UP

## FOR THE MEG CHARITY RUN

**Text and images by Sophia Silverton & Anne Joost (MEG14)**

Imagine Stadtgarten on a cool, sunny afternoon. Slackliners bouncing up and down, a drum circle in the distance. A couple of MEGs sat in the shade under a tree, reminiscing about times when their generation was still in the city, and wondering how the other generations were doing.

Then an idea started to bloom: What if they organized a fun event that MEGs all over the world could take part in? One that brings people together, is energizing, and raises money for a good cause?



Image: MEGgies showing off their hard-earned medals following their run

This is how the MEG Virtual Charity Run was born!

Fast forward, and the MEG community voted for ClientEarth as this year's recipient charity. ClientEarth is an international environmental law charity which takes on active cases, lends their expertise to help shape new law and policy, and works in partnerships with communities to increase access to environmental law as a lever for change.

The Charity Run week quickly arrived with a forecast of straight rain. But no matter! A friendly group enjoyed a jog together in Freiburg's leafy paradise, Mooswald, and around the world other MEGs joined in virtually from Germany, Italy, Mexico, South Korea, the United States and Canada! A MEG Mom even canoed 5km for the cause! All in, we've run over 75km together!

We are so happy to announce that the MEG community has raised €360 for ClientEarth. Thank you for your donations and enthusiasm! This has been a true celebration of the MEG spirit, and a great way to kick off an active summer!



# MEGGIES ON THE MOVE

## KEEPING ACTIVE AND STAYING SOCIAL

**Text and header image by Pablo Nuñez**

Long nights preparing for exams, adjusting to life in a new city, navigating the German bureaucracy. The beginning of any MEG student's journey can be daunting. For the MEG16 cohort, who have so far only experienced their courses virtually, there have been an entirely new set of challenges.

For example, seemingly endless hours on Zoom and strict corona measures

have meant that MEG16s have had to find creative ways to stay mentally and physically fit. The closing of all indoor gyms in late October led some MEG16s to seek out alternative fitness options, such as the "Bewegungspark" in the Sternwald area. Built as a collaboration between the City of Freiburg's Forestry Office and the Institute of Sport and Sport Science of the University of Freiburg, this outdoor gym has become a frequent meet-up spot for several MEG students. They have benefited from these outdoor



Image: MEG16s in action





Image above: Two MEG16s enjoying the “shoulder press” station at the Sternwald Bewegungspark

facilities to stay active during the various lockdowns, even opting to continue going on a regular basis during the harsh winter months. The outdoor gym has also become a place for important social bonding, where MEG16s can get to know each other better outside of the Zoom classroom.

Another idea MEG16s have devised to stay active and create social bonds has been to create a group for those interested in meeting to play soccer. Once the restrictions allowed for outdoor sports activities in small

groups, this group of MEG16s were quick to organize themselves in order to play the sport they love. While under more normal circumstances this would be a seemingly trivial activity for MEG students, the ability to play sports in small groups again represents an important step for MEG16s in getting closer to the normality of what the MEG experience has to offer. While these are just two examples of how MEG16s have stayed active, they demonstrate resilience in the face of a very difficult situation.



# MEGNETIC ACTIVITIES

## CALLING MEG5

**Text by Ilja Lange (MEG10), Rafaella Ziegert (MEG13), and Sofie Hovmand (MEG14)**

**Map: Brandon McGill (MEG11)**

The MEG Alumni Network Committee has begun the practice of bringing together liaisons of each generation. At the moment, we have gathered all generations, except for MEG5, which means that we encourage any interested parties belonging to this generation to reach out to us.

With the focal point structure, we provide our community with a contact person for matters regarding the MEG network.

Tempered by the corona pandemic, we have organised online activities, culminating in two liaison meetings. We have also supported MEG liaisons, who have organised virtual get-togethers for their generations. With the above, we wish to establish a communication platform for knowledge, information, and skills that can sustain the MEG spirit all throughout the globe!

Join our collaborative MEG network map: <https://canvis.app/meg-network>  
For questions, comments, and MEG5 nominations:

[megalumnicommittee@gmail.com](mailto:megalumnicommittee@gmail.com)



Image: Interactive MEG network map

# ZOOM THEATRE

## STUDYING ONLINE IS HARD, BUT HAVE YOU EVER TRIED THEATRE ON ZOOM?

**Text and header image by Maya Rollberg (MEG16)**

In the past year, we've all had to try out things we never thought were possible or at all fun when done at home with no one around. For me, this meant starting a master's degree without ever being at my university and even starting a theatre production without ever seeing the cast act on stage.

To my great surprise, both these endeavors seem to be working much better than expected. Both with MEG and with our theatre production, we have managed to establish an online community with members that care for each another and meets up online to work, to talk, to eat, to reflect and to celebrate together. The key is to create community and to make sure that people can meet up in caring spaces, for example, through offline walks that are organized in pairs of two. I think we have managed that in our MEG16 group very well, and so did our online

theatre, where it is essential that all people in the ensemble trust each other when we finally have the chance to act on stage again.



Image: Rehearsals on a make-shift in full swing  
- provided by Maya Rollberg

We have been rehearsing online for five months, doing most of the theatre stuff we never thought would be possible remotely. Flat-mates were annoyed by loud noises of voice warm-ups, neighbours were wondering why the people above them jumped up and down in the middle of the night, and improv games created loud laughter that filled our Zoom rooms. We also





We also started acting scenes out on Zoom, incorporating our virtual realities, rooms and unstable connections as part of the scene. As a director, I have learned a lot about what is needed for an ensemble to feel safe and about how the beauty of acting can consist of the little things, like mirroring each other on a screen. Although I am desperate for a live audience, the online setting has trained us much more than we thought and encouraged people to get out of their comfort zone in a safe and barrier-free setting.

Still, I cannot wait to start rehearsing in-person and to check what the actors

have learned online. This moment has now come, and we are starting with live rehearsals for our multiple-choice theatre show, which features audience interaction through E-voting, influence on stage design and different paths of action for Frank Wedekind's "Spring Awakening" that our literature team has written for this show.

In the mean time, the production will be live streamed for an audience at home and around the world (in German unfortunately). Tune in and find more info to "Frühlings Erwachen" via

<https://uni.theater/wedekindadaption>

# Frühlings *Eine Adaption nach Ihrer Wahl* Erwachen

Image: Production poster - provided by Maya Rollberg



# ANONYMOUS PROSE

'LET TOMORROW START  
A NEW'

## Text submitted anonymously

Cocooned in bittersweet nostalgia, plead before the river of time to cease  
its flow.

A moment, please.

Let me savour the flavour of my skin, let me breathe my soul in.

Let me listen to my heart's voice for once, for an instant let me see my  
thoughts drizzle.

But let also me unburden myself of this spirit.

Let me fly away to ecstasy.

But let also me enjoy the warmth of this home.

Let a path find me for once, let the past forget me for once.

Let air find its way to my lungs, let a gentle voice grace my drums.

Let inspiration long for me, let thirst discover me.

Let desire fail me, oh please let this silence and song marry.





Play me the chords of my heart for a change.

Beam a shine in my eyes as a game.

Let existence disgrace me, but let also time embrace me.

Let me lose my self, let me mourn my self.

Let my intellect disentangle, let my heart be abandoned.

Let me bleed this eulogy. Let me chant with this elegy.

Let me mourn my self.  
Let me mourn my self.  
Let me mourn my self.

But also let tomorrow start anew.





Image above: The view over Freiburg - provided by Anne Joost (MEG14)

### **A note from the editor - until next time...!**

After another fantastic edition of the MEG newsletter, we now look forward to Winter semester 2021. In September, the 17th generation of MEGgies will be officially introduced to the programme. To those students, we say a very warm welcome and we hope this newsletter gave you a glimpse into the vibrant community that you will soon be a part of.

In the meantime, the MEG network is constantly active and there is always much to report. If you felt inspired by the submissions and would like to share a piece for next time, keep an eye out for the next call for submissions in your email inbox. More details on how to contribute will be shared in good time!

Alles Gute!

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