Minor in Transformative and Sustainable Economies

Description

A minor gives you the opportunity of having a second specialization in your degree. This minor is a bundle of three electives that can be chosen separately or together. If chosen together, it will reward the student with a minor-certificate, which attests that the student acquired a specific and coherent set of skills and that the student is a specialist in that field (see Purpose).

Purpose

This minor allows students to critically interrogate and reimagine the foundations and organizing practices of today's global economy. It provides the students with tools to understand and analyze the ongoing major societal and economic challenges and to explore transformative and sustainable alternatives. The minor takes a holistic view of sustainability and argues that in order to build sustainable and socially just economies, we need to take a broader look at how business and organizational practices are embedded in societal structures. This will provide students with the tools they need to become conscious entrepreneurs, innovators, managers and change-makers – be it through business, non-profit organizations, or the implementation of innovative and transformative ideas in the realm of local, national or supra-national political and economic institutions.

The minor is composed of three courses that each offer a cutting-edge and trans-disciplinary set of knowledge and ideas that enable them to become transformative actors within their future career trajectory in the private, public, or non-profit sectors. The minor introduces students to contemporary theories of social and economic transformation, while also focusing on the concrete and practical challenges that organizations face when striving for change. Here, the minor provides a particular focus on change of and within the corporation as a dominant organizing model of our societies, as well as experiments with alternative forms of organization, including social enterprises, cooperatives, and social movements.

The course "**Reimagining Capitalism. Towards Just and Sustainable Futures**" provides students with foundational knowledge on the contemporary global economy and its relationship with some of the most pressing societal challenges: climate change, growing inequalities, and the growing fragility of democratic political systems all around the world. It provides students with an overview of the historical developments of capitalism, understood as the dominant socio-economic system in the last four hundred years. Students will be introduced to both historical and cutting-edge debates: these include the role of social reproduction and care in the economy, the relationship between capitalism and climate change in the Anthropocene, the relationship between capitalism and the expansion of colonial powers, but also the role of artificial intelligence and digital technologies for

the future of work. These theoretical debates will be complemented by a number of empirical case studies illustrative of contemporary attempts to re-imagine capitalism such B-corporations, non-profit organizations, eco-villages, food sovereignty movements, and consumer movements.

The course "**The Political Corporation**" puts a particular focus on one of the central and most powerful institutions of contemporary capitalism, namely the corporation. The aim of this course is to make the student capable of critically analyzing and assessing the corporation as a political entity, the political constitution of the corporation, the corporate form as well as different critiques of the corporation and proposals for transforming it. In order to understand the role of the corporation in our current political and economic situation, we need to understand it not merely as an economic entity, but as a political entity which is constituted politically and which wields political power both externally and internally. The course goes into depth with the nature of the corporation and the corporate form as well as different critiques of corporate power and proposals for transforming it, such as stakeholder corporate governance, foundation-, cooperatively- or worker-owned corporations and workplace democracy.

The course "**Organizing for Social and Environmental Change**" introduces students to alternative forms of organizing the economy and society by exploring concrete cases from the private, public and civil society sectors. This includes examples from circular economies, sustainable entrepreneurship, alternative finance, and the digital commons. Based on case study discussions of businesses and organizations, students will explore the values and strategies used in current organizational efforts to change our economies and societies, as well as their limitations. They will discuss the concrete managerial, entrepreneurial and leadership challenges that arise within such alternative practices or organizing.

The minor is part of the series Advanced Studies Electives. It addresses students in their last year of their master who are looking for inspiration for their master theses.

The minor will introduce interdisciplinary research in the fields of Sustainable Entrepreneurship, Organization and Business Studies, Political Sociology and Political Economy including state of-the-art debates and questions for potential master theses.

Structure

The minor consists of three courses which have been constructed to complement each other by providing the students with interlinked debates, points of reflection, and case studies. The course "Re-imagining Capitalism. Towards Just and Sustainable Futures" offers some broad perspectives and introduces some foundational concepts and debates that link to the topics of the other two courses. The course "The Political Corporation" focuses specifically on the corporation not only as an economic, but also as a political and social subject. The course "Organizing for Social and Environmental Change. Theory and Practice of Alternative Organization" change" takes alternative forms of organization and management as its main subject and addresses practical challenges of organizing for change. The content of each course has been developed in order to avoid overlapping topics but to create a coherent and well-structured narrative.

The structure and the ECTS credits of the individual courses are listed below. The course descriptions are available in the online course catalogue.

Course	ECTS
Re-Imagining Capitalism. Towards Just and Sustainable Futures	7.5
The Political Corporation	7.5
Organizing for Social and Environmental Change. Theory and Practice of Alternative Organizations	7.5

Content

Re-imagining Capitalism. Towards Just and Sustainable Futures (KAN-CSOCV1026U)

In order to critically understand the ongoing multiple crises on the economic, social and environmental level and in order to envision sustainable and just futures, an understanding of the current socio-economic system, namely capitalism, is a fundamental and foundational prerequisite.

In the last years, and especially after the North-Atlantic financial crisis of 2007-2008, many scholars and observers have underlined the unsustainability of capitalism and the need to re-imagine our economies, their underlying logic, and their functioning mechanisms. Even the economic newspaper Financial Times has recently launched a media campaign and a column titled "Capitalism: Time for a Reset" encouraging business leaders to challenge the past decade's dominant business tenets of infinite growth and profits, and opening up the debate on topics such as the ethics of investing, the risk in big technology and the future of the corporate world.

As a response to this emerging awareness, many individuals, communities and organizations around the world are experimenting with new governance structures, with "purpose-driven" ways of doing business, with alternative ways of producing and consuming goods, and with non-conventional lifestyles. Some of these practices come from local, self-organized, grassroots societal niches but have the potential to disrupt the status quo by prefiguring in the present a better society for the future. For this reason, it is important to get to know them and interpret them not only as niches of innovation, but as seeds of scalable social and economic change.

The underlying "big" question to the course is the following:

Can we re-imagine and reform contemporary capitalism "from within" to make it a more just and sustainable system, or do we need to implement a totally new socio-economic system, a system able to sustain the flourishing of human and non-human life throughout the 21st century?

The course is organized in **three main blocks**.

The first part titled **"Theories and Critiques of Capitalism"** will allow the students to define capitalism and understand its evolution over the course of modern history until today. In this part, we will also get an overview of the main critiques posed to capitalism by classic social theory and by civil society. In parallel with these theoretical debates, we will learn how to frame, in light of the functioning of contemporary capitalism, some of the most pressing societal issues such as the ecological crisis in the Anthropocene, the call for more equality and recognition by feminist social movements and LGBTQI communities, and the sky-rocketing inequalities between the Global North and South.

This will allow us to transition to the second block titled **"Transformative Practices Towards Just and Sustainable Societies".** In fact, after the critique, the *pars destruens*, comes the *pars construen*s: the proposal for alternatives. In this part, mostly based on case study discussions of existing communities, firms, networks, social movements and organizations, students will learn about the values, logics, strategies, practices, risks and challenges to ameliorate our economies and societies. Among the empirical case studies deployed, we find the case of the biggest and oldest intentional community in the world, Auroville in the South of India, the case of social and solidarity economy in the Global South, the alternative food network of consumer-citizens in Italy, and, finally, the case of local democracy and local municipalism inspired by Kate Raworth's

"doughnut economics" model. Most of the sessions in this part will include the participation of (in person or online) invited guests from civil society, the public and the private sector to share their experience and reflections on how to transform organizations and communities towards a more just and sustainable world.

The third and final part of the course is titled **“Future Imaginaries and Conclusions”.** In this part we will discuss – inspired by fictional and sci-fi recounts present in books, movies and pop-culture - on how the future of our societies and economies will look like. The growing use of artificial intelligence, robots, automation, for instance, is fostering a vibrant debate on the seemingly uselessness of human work and on the potentialities and risks resulting from the increasing intelligence of robots. Similarly, apocalyptic recounts on the potential consequences of climate change and the destruction of natural habitats are thought provoking and alarming. What will human societies look like in the future? How can we steer positive change to avoid ecological and social catastrophes? Shall we shift our values, beliefs and the idea that humankind is the dominant species on this planet? This final part of the course will encourage us to use our creative and critical minds to tackle important and fascinating issues. Contemporary sci-fi movies and books will be used to stimulate our discussions.

The Political Corporation (KAN-CSOCV1027U)

The aim of this course is to make the student capable of critically analyzing and assessing the corporation as a political entity, the political constitution of the corporation, the corporate form as well as different critiques of the corporation and proposals for transforming it.

The corporation plays a dominant role in the global economy, accounting for a substantial proportion of the world’s top 100 economies as well as of global carbon emissions. Corporations wield massive political power and influence through lobbying and political campaigns. Corporations are also increasingly becoming powerful agents of social and economic development through Corporate Social Responsibility, Corporate Citizenship and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Corporations occupy a paradoxical role in our social and political order as both agents of innovation, growth, development and prosperity, as well as of inequality, whitewashing, tax evasion, financial crises, climate crisis and environmental disasters.

As a result of the negative externalities produced by corporations, and their political and economic power, debates about the regulation of corporate power, for instance of tech-giants, have proliferated in recent years. At the same time, a number of critiques of corporate power and suggestions for transformations of corporations are being voiced in these years from political parties and candidates, social movements, NGO’s and think-tanks, but also from actors such as the World Economic Forum and Business Roundtable.

The course argues that in order to understand the role of the corporation in our current political and economic situation, we need to understand it not merely as an economic entity, but as a political entity which is constituted politically and which wields political power both externally and internally. The course illuminates the political nature of the corporation in a three-fold way: 1) as politically constituted, thereby highlighting the interactions with states, law and other political organizations, and what this means for what a corporation is and the power it wields; 2) as exercising political power externally in a number of settings; and 3) as exercising political authority over its members and jurisdiction and what this means for the internal governance of corporations.

The course is divided into three parts. The first part discusses and introduces approaches with which to understand the corporation as a political entity. The second part investigates how the corporation wields political power and influence externally through for instance corporate social responsibility and corporate citizenship. The third part investigates how the corporation wields political power internally over its members (employees) and jurisdiction. The course also offers discussions about how to transform corporations through theories and cases of stakeholder corporate governance, foundation-, cooperatively-, or worker-owned corporations and workplace democracy.

Organizing for Social and Environmental Change. Theory and Practice of Alternative Organizations (KAN-CSOCV1040U)

The aim of this course is to explore managerial, entrepreneurial and leadership challenges that alternative organizations face when striving to organize for change. Alternative organizations broadly describe a variety of practices that aim to ‘organize differently’ than the conventional governance forms presented in neoclassical economics, and which have the intention to tackle environmental degradation, social inequalities and democratic instability. By foregrounding values related to sustainability, equality, responsibility and care, alternative organizations seek to challenge the prevailing dominance of shareholder value, growth and competition.

The first module of the course discusses the context and definitions of alternative organization. What are the various critiques posed to conventional organizing, and how do alternative organizations emerge as a reaction to issue salience or institutional failure? We will learn about the different types of alternative organizations, including large business organizations, startups, social enterprises, public agencies, workers/consumer cooperatives, and social movements; and discuss the role of values, ownership models, decision making structures and social relations for eliciting change. In the second module, students will work with case studies to explore the concrete organizational challenges that emerge from managing tensions between financial growth and sustainability, collaboration and competition, autonomy and authority, inclusion and exclusion, innovation and disruption, and change and cooptation. The course also invites practitioners, who will share how they translate their values into daily organizing practice. In the final part, we ask what kind of change a singular organization can elicit? We examine the systemic and institutional conditions for scaling up change initiatives, and for creating resilient and sustainable organizations.

The aim of this course is to develop a critical understanding of alternative organizing practices including their paradoxes and unintended effects by considering various socio-economic and cultural theories. We will discuss this on case studies drawing on alternative finance, ‘non-growing’ companies, leaderless organizations, digital commons, circular economies, sustainable entrepreneurship, and feminist organizations. Further case studies can be selected by the students themselves.

Examinations

The minor consists of the examinations listed below. The learning objectives and the regulations of the individual examinations are prescribed in the online course catalogue. Direct links to the individual examinations are inserted in the table below.

Exam name	Exam form	Gradingscale	Internal/external exam	ECTS
Re-Imagining Capitalism. Towards Just and Sustainable Futures	Home assignment - written product	7-point grading scale	Internal exam	7.5

Exam name	Exam form	Gradingscale	Internal/external exam	ECTS
The Political Corporation	Home assignment - written product	7-point grading scale	Internal exam	7.5
Organizing for Social and Environmental Change. Theory and Practice of Alternative Organizations	Oral exam based on written product	7-point grading scale	Internal exam	7.5

Further information

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