

Transformation and adaptation: A research programme on the preconditions for governance and human progress

Adaptation and transformation have for long been key subjects of study of many sciences ranging from evolutionary biology to business administration. This programme seeks to analyze the dynamic relationship between the environment (broadly defined) on the one hand and individuals and communities on the other. Humans and human societies are dependent on various resources required for survival and development such as a healthy environment, food and other sources of energy, the organized production of which tend to be in constant flux. In other words, there is a constant transformation of the preconditions for the production and allocation of needed resources. Collective adaptation requires an active process through which actors proactively foresee such transformations and coordinate their struggles for improved positions under new circumstances. The idea that modern societies, and other organizations, may develop the ability to adapt to changing circumstances using scientifically based methods, has been firmly entrenched ever since the enlightenment. While there is a growing awareness of the limitations of scientific thinking within certain areas, it is still crucial when it comes to analyzing and tackling changes and potential threats to human organizations and societies.

This programme focuses on various transformations of the social, technical and natural environment and attempts to adapt to such changing circumstances. Societal adaptation, or its absence and hence decline or even collapse, has been and remains a main challenge to humanity. Such diverse thinkers and researchers as Nicolo Machiavelli, Thomas Malthus, Ester Boserup and Jared Diamond, and the many debaters contributing to the discussions on sustainable development and energy systems, have shed light upon the question in different ways. Due to its enormous scope and complexity, the question of societal adaptation has tended to be studied within separate disciplines. Thus, research on adaptation has generally been characterized by the outlooks of single disciplines.

The purpose of this programme is to approach the question of adaptation from a broad, interdisciplinary perspective. More specifically, it will examine various aspect of social adaptation to changing circumstances, such as steep declines in the supply of strategic resources like oil, water and food grains, changing patterns of consumption, technical and environmental change etc. The programme will focus on attempts at adaptation on the part of various forms of social organization, ranging from empires to multinational companies and hunter-gatherer communities. Given the scope of the matter, researchers from a wide variety of disciplines such as historians, economists, law scholars, hydrologists, anthropologists, agronomists, physicists, sociologists, epidemiologists, archeologists, and geographers will be invited to examine cases were transformations have brought the need of adaptation to the fore.

Under the heading "Transformation and adaptation" the programme will organize a series of seminars and invite international scholars from the natural and social sciences.

Researchers

Yahia Mahmoud

Before turning to geography I studied international relations and political science in Latin America and Development Studies in Sweden. My PhD dissertation treated China's involvement in West Africa and its effects on Agricultural Development. My graduate studies focused on developmental issues in Asia and were carried out at the Centre for East and Southeast Asian Studies in Lund and South China Normal University in Canton. Nowadays, my research interest is within the confines of development geography and development studies, but I also deal with issues of international relations, political economy, cultural studies, environmental issues,

migration and the effects of globalisation. Presently I am working on China's economic presence in Africa and its varied consequences.

Olle Frödin

As an undergraduate I studied philosophy, sociology, history, economic history, and political science in Lund. I got my PhD from the Department of Sociology, Lund University. My PhD thesis dealt with the consequences of the political reforms in South Africa after the fall of Apartheid, with specific reference to the introduction of new "developmental" local governments. My main interests concern political economy, governance and historical sociology from comparative and international perspectives. I am currently doing post-doc research on the political economy of food grains in India, in affiliation with the Department of Internal Development, University of Oxford.