



Sustainability at the Weizenbaum Institute

Strategy

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Contents

- 1. Introduction 3
- 2. Methodical, evidence-based and inclusive way of working 4
- 3. Fields of action 5
 - 3.1 Research practice 5
 - 3.2 Everyday operations and office culture 6
 - 3.3 Events and knowledge transfer 7
 - 3.4 IT and communication systems 9
 - 3.5 Travelling 10
 - 3.6 Governance 12

„The publicly funded Weizenbaum Institute is committed to the common good in the sense of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. We make decisions in research, administration and IT infrastructure with sustainable development in mind.“
– Mission statement of the Weizenbaum Institute

1. Introduction

The Weizenbaum Institute is committed to the goal of sustainability. We understand sustainability to mean the overarching principle of global and intergenerational justice as well as the long-term preservation of our livelihoods in the form of intact ecosystems (Brundtland Report 1987).

Against the backdrop of the major challenges posed by man-made changes to our natural environment, we, as a scientific research institute, want to and must play our part in society's overall sustainability efforts. Sustainability is not only aimed at preserving biodiversity or limiting global warming, but also at strengthening the skills necessary to help shape societal life. Well aware of the narrow limits of our own effectiveness in this respect, we want to align our actions with our long-term responsibility to ensure the *ecological sustainability, social justice* and long-term *economic viability* of our social coexistence. We therefore want to use the opportunities and degrees of freedom available to us to align the Institute's actions specifically with sustainability criteria and to make this alignment binding for the organization. This means analysing the relevant effects of the Institute's work and either adapting the causes to be compatible with sustainability or compensating for the effects in other ways. As a research organization, we bear direct responsibility for the impact of our activities on society, employees and the environment.

As a research institute, we see ourselves as having a special responsibility for two reasons. Although we, a centre for research into the transformation and design processes of digital change, do not conduct climate research, the topic of sustainability is an important and overarching part of our research agenda. We also make valuable and critical contributions to topics such as social justice, democracy, open science and responsible digital innovation. All of these topics are also reflected in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. At the Weizenbaum Institute, we want to fulfil the aspirations described above through the content and focus of our research activities.

On the other hand, we take the findings and recommendations of the transformation sciences – based on social, environmental and climate sciences – seriously. The described effects on nature, people and society are catastrophic and show a global development that threatens our very existence. These findings are neither an exaggeration nor “scaremongering”, but the result of thorough

scientific work. We recognise this and align our operational activities as closely as possible with these findings.

Sustainability in its various dimensions therefore influences the subject of our research on the one hand, and on the other hand we ask ourselves the question: How can this normative orientation be translated into our operational activities at the institute? This strategy document is dedicated to this question. In order to structure this, six fields of action can be distinguished:

1. Research practice
2. Everyday operations and office culture
3. Events and transfer
4. IT and communication systems
5. Travelling
6. Governance

This document describes sustainability targets for these six fields and explains which activities have already been carried out and which are still being pursued. It also clarifies how sustainable development issues are to be implemented in the long term. The activities and goals listed require an active commitment to the sustainability standards of the Weizenbaum Institute from all stakeholders involved.

Implementation of this strategy in the work of the Weizenbaum-Institut e.V. as a research institution and network coordinator is planned for the start of the institute's establishment phase (15 September 2022). The Sustainability Working Group, in which various status groups of the institute are represented, will continue to be responsible for the further development of the sustainability strategy and the monitoring of its achievement. In accordance with the recommendations of the Evaluation Commission of February 2022, the work of the working group will be led by a member of the Managing Board and coordinated by a sustainability officer to be appointed (and, if necessary, by officers and clerks from areas such as procurement).

2. Methodical, evidence-based and inclusive way of working

Our actions are based on a careful analysis of the prevailing situation at the Weizenbaum Institute in order to identify relevant potential for optimisation and to avoid activities that only appear to be effective. For this purpose, we conduct our own efforts at appropriate intervals or commission external companies to prepare detailed analyses of the Institute's impact on sustainability. This includes a hot-spot and in-depth analysis of the institute's direct and indirect CO₂ emissions. Only on the basis of these findings can continuous sustainability

adjustments be made in a meaningful way; whereby external expertise can also be called upon for further methodical and systematic development of the strategy.

The sustainability management system to be established at the Weizenbaum Institute will ensure the continuous implementation, evaluation, readjustment and further development of the sustainability strategy. This means that specific requirements and recommendations in this strategy can be adjusted and/or cancelled, for example if new potential savings are found or less effective measures are identified as such. In addition, low-threshold participation opportunities are provided for all members of the institute to involve them in the process, listen to their ideas and also to maintain the necessary legitimacy of any upcoming processes of change in the institute.

3. Fields of action

3.1 Research practice

In terms of sustainable research practice, the Weizenbaum Institute pursues the principles of open science, open data and open source, among others. The institute's first joint application states:

„The principle of open network structures thus serves as a guideline for the research, teaching and knowledge transfer formats at the Weizenbaum Institute. Special support is given to open source and open interfaces to the Institute's infrastructure (e.g., software), open access publication formats in line with the open access strategy of the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research launched in 2016, open data projects (access to, processing of and research with open data [...]), Open Education (innovative teaching formats and live streaming, Open Educational Resources), Open Innovation (collaborative product or process development) and Open Science (reviews from society and feedback from citizens) as well as the aforementioned Open Lab with innovative forms of collaboration.“

The term “informational sustainability” is also becoming established, particularly in relation to software and data, which includes the long-term and socially responsible use of IT systems.

- \ For the Weizenbaum Institute, this means that our research is published as much as possible in Open Access publication formats, i.e., it can be

accessed online worldwide and permanently free of charge and without barriers.

- \ Comprehensive research structures are being established at the Institute, which will enable well-founded and long-term data collection.
- \ The Institute's IT infrastructure is largely based on free software, such as the infrastructure for communication, data exchange and the intranet.
- \ All planning and operation of information technology systems at the Institute is also organised from the point of view of "informational sustainability", for example through the preferential use of free software or, more generally, through the creation or improvement of free IT infrastructures.

Example: Free access to research data is one of the central demands of the open science movement. However, anyone who wants to open up data faces a variety of challenges and question marks: What needs to be considered in terms of data protection? Where can I archive my data? What context do I need to provide to make my data reusable? In 2020, the "Digitisation of Science" research group held a workshop on the topic of "Archiving and secondary use of qualitative research data". The result: a [handout](#) with tips on sharing qualitative research data (available in German).

3.2 Everyday operations and office culture

In view of the relatively large procurement volume and the use of various services, there is a great deal of potential for the sustainable organisation of day-to-day operations and office culture at the Weizenbaum Institute. At the same time, as a publicly funded organisation, the Institute is subject to numerous legal and financial requirements. This means that the possibility to implement sustainability aspects in day-to-day operations and in office culture is limited in some cases. The following measures describe our aim to optimise the sustainability of the institute's day-to-day operations and procurement.

- \ Ecological, social and economic aspects always play a central role from tendering and procurement to disposal. Sustainability criteria are also given special consideration when making new framework agreements. Employees in purchasing and procurement are informed, motivated and trained accordingly.
- \ The aspects of environmental compatibility, durability, low waste, ease of repair and reusability or recyclability are given special consideration in the procurement of products of all kinds. For this purpose, common seals are used to mark products and services that are more sustainable or environmentally friendly than others within a product group in terms of individual characteristics (e.g. Blue Angel, EU Ecolabel, EU Energy Label, Energy Star, EU organic logo). Where applicable, when we ask for quotes, we require suppliers to adhere to the standards of these certain

sustainability labels or certificates. Office supplies are preferably ordered from sustainable suppliers (e.g., memo). In the course of the first establishment phase of the Weizenbaum Institute (09/2022 to 09/2025), sustainability aspects are to be made mandatory in the procurement of products.

- \ Employees directly employed by the Weizenbaum-Institut e.V. should be provided with discounted “VBB job tickets” – provided this is compatible with the institute’s public funding guidelines. The aim is to encourage employees to use public transport to get to work. Those who come to work by bike will also find bicycle parking spaces at the side entrance.
- \ We try to save paper – in particular through the use of HR, ERP and other software that digitalises numerous processes. In addition, only recycled paper is procured. When commissioning external service providers for larger print jobs, special consideration is given to environmental and sustainability issues (e.g., use of recycled paper, organic inks, green electricity).
- \ The range of food and drink provided at the institute is designed to be sustainable (e.g., reusable, organic, fair trade).
- \ When disposing of waste, attention is paid to waste separation. External researchers are also informed about this topic when they arrive. The Institute’s property management undertakes to provide sufficient waste containers and to inform the cleaning service provider about correct waste separation and disposal.
- \ Due to the constellation of operators and tenants in the building, the Weizenbaum Institute has few options when it comes to saving energy. Accordingly, employees are asked to take individual responsibility for helping to save energy by switching off lights when leaving rooms, turning down the temperature setting on radiators, especially over the weekend, and turning off water taps completely.
- \ With a few exceptions, the Institute’s newspaper and magazine subscriptions are digital.
- \ The aim is to discuss constructively with the Institute’s funders how aspects of sustainability and the ecological footprint, which are currently not sufficiently taken into account in public procurement law, can nevertheless be taken into account in procurement.

Example: In order to encourage and promote a collaborative working atmosphere and exchange between employees and researchers at different locations (social sustainability) while minimising energy-intensive email traffic (ecological sustainability), the Weizenbaum Institute uses a data protection-friendly open source infrastructure as a shared chat tool and overarching communication platform (informational sustainability).

3.3 Events and knowledge transfer

Our science needs exchange, both within the academic community and with civil society and other stakeholders. This is why the Weizenbaum Institute and its research groups regularly organise conferences, round tables in small groups or formats for the public. We do this in a variety of ways: be it through dialogue with experts from the field in the Weizenbaum Forum, through low-threshold access to current research at the Weizenbaum Film Night or with numerous digital formats of science communication (e.g., the podcast series “Weizenbaum im Homeoffice”). We aim to ensure that our research has a lasting impact with emphasis on the transfer of scientific work and findings that address as diverse a public as possible. With a strong focus on the transfer of scientific work and findings, addressed to as diverse a public as possible, we aim to ensure that our research has a lasting impact.

However, events and transfer activities are often resource-intensive. Necessary materials, catering, arrival and departure of guests – all of these need to be considered and rethought in order to meet the requirements of sustainable event management. It is not always possible to equally fulfil all three dimensions of sustainability described in the introduction. The catering company with the best working conditions and the most ecological menus may also be the most expensive – and the cheapest way to get there is often far from being the most ecological. This dilemma shows the limitations of our actions and the need for systemic change.

The Weizenbaum Institute is financed by public funds. This means that we see ourselves as a role model, but it is also why we must act in an economically sustainable manner. It is important to find clever co-operations and compromises here.

- \ Events generate a lot of waste: flyers, programme booklets, stickers and information brochures. We achieve our goal of a paperless and low-waste event primarily by using data protection-compliant event apps for the event programme and additional information. In addition, PR materials are evaluated according to ecological standards (e.g., tote bags made from organic cotton, pencils instead of pens) and usefulness (e.g., seed bombs instead of oil-based plastic products).
- \ Event materials: In addition to ecological standards and the usefulness of promotional items, we pay attention to reusability and modular systems that can be rebranded for event materials such as banners / stands / notices.

Example: For the Weizenbaum Conference 2019, the web-based and data protection-friendly application LineUpr was used instead of an event programme booklet. The system allows the programme to be displayed in full with all background information, push notifications to be sent to participants and event feedback to be collected during the event. Specifically, the printing of around 400 brochures with 32 pages each was saved at the event, as was the printing of feedback forms. As we decided to drastically reduce the use of paper at events

after the Weizenbaum Conference 2019, the app was used again in the following years and is now standard at larger Weizenbaum events.

- \ Catering: Avoiding meat products in catering is the simplest and most effective way to make an event more sustainable in several respects. We therefore rely on meat-free catering and select offers according to the following criteria: vegetarian in any case, vegan if possible; seasonal and regional dishes; fair working conditions for employees; short travel distances; reusable packaging and crockery.
- \ Food donations: 17 per cent of food produced worldwide ends up as waste – according to the United Nations Food Waste Index Report 2021. How can food waste be avoided at events? In order to better estimate the amount of food required, participants are asked in advance which meals they would like to attend. If there is any good, edible food left over after the event, it is donated to local organisations in accordance with the HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points) hygiene standard.

Example: At the parliamentary evening in October 2019 and at the joint conference with the WBGU in December 2019, only vegan food was offered. Furthermore, attention is also paid to the regionality and seasonality of vegan and vegetarian food so that production and transport resources can be saved.

- \ In order to organise the arrival, departure and stay of guests as sustainably as possible, it is also important to choose a suitable event location. CO2 emissions can be reduced if the venue is easily accessible by public transport (especially rail). Guests should also be encouraged in the invitation to avoid travelling by air. For guests travelling long distances in particular, the extent to which participation by video conference can be made possible will be examined as standard.
- \ During the coronavirus pandemic, the Institute successfully organised virtual and hybrid events. The Weizenbaum Conference “Democracy in Flux” in June 2021 is a good example. In the future, we will continue to examine whether virtual formats can be a useful and more sustainable addition.

3.4 IT and communication systems

The area of IT and communication systems (IT / ICT) is of central importance for the operation of the Weizenbaum Institute. Two sustainability-relevant aspects can be identified in the use of IT / ICT - the material and the social aspect.

The former includes the material resources of the systems, whether they are installed directly on site (cables, routers, etc.), used by employees (laptops, screens, etc.) or rented or operated in data centres (server systems, etc.). However, the resource aspect includes not only the hardware components of the systems, but also the type of energy used or the operational framework conditions, such as the

specific design of the cooling systems. The second aspect relates to the social effects and implications of the systems used, i.e. the social conditions of production (avoidance of child labour, conflict minerals, etc.) and operation (appropriate payment of employees, etc.).

Both aspects are central to the sustainable operation of the research institute. Despite existing limitations, e.g. the dependence on the landlord, measures aimed at these aspects are formulated below:

- \ We apply the proven 5R waste prevention and recycling cascade: *refuse, reduce, reuse, repair, recycle*. Only devices that are really needed are purchased (refuse, reduce) and these are also used as efficiently and for as long as possible (reuse) or repaired (repair). The aspects of ergonomics and occupational health are taken into account at the same time. In addition, the usual electronic recycling routes for the final disposal of hardware in Germany are followed (recycle).
- \ With regard to the use of renewable energies (green electricity) and highly efficient cooling systems, the Institute is dependent on the landlord on site. When using external server capacities in data centres, however, particular attention is paid to the material criteria described above.
- \ Certifications such as the Blue Angel (see above) or explicit IT projects with a focus on sustainability, such as the “Fairphone”, are suitable for ensuring social aspects. Options such as these should be monitored and evaluated at regular intervals.
- \ In the course of the next funding phase, binding rules for the procurement and operation of IT / ICT will be set throughout the institute and a CO2 evaluation and compensation will be sought.

3.5 Travelling

International exchange at conferences, fellowships and joint research projects with several partner organisations in Germany and abroad are all quality features of the Weizenbaum Institute. Business trips are essential for this exchange, but have a negative impact on the Institute’s carbon footprint. According to calculations by the Federal Environment Agency (reference year 2019), a domestic flight produces 214 grams of CO2 per person per kilometre. By comparison, a train journey consumes only 29 grams of CO2 per person and kilometre, around 13% of a domestic flight. Long-distance travel has a particularly strong impact. According to the emissions calculator of the climate protection organisation *atmosfair*, a passenger on an economy flight from Berlin to New York and back generates around 3 tonnes of CO2. However, to achieve the warming target of max. 1.5° C demanded by scientists, each person would have an annual CO2 budget of only approx. 1.5 tonnes.

Up until now, decisions on transport have primarily been made on the basis of cost effectiveness. Unfortunately, the cheapest means of transport is usually not

characterised by its climate friendliness. Train tickets are often more expensive than short-haul flights, and direct flights are more expensive than flights with a stopover. In January 2020, the German government published its Climate Protection Programme 2030, which includes plans to amend the Federal Travel Expenses Act (BRKG).

In the future, sustainability will also be taken into account when choosing a means of travel, in addition to economic efficiency. This means that even if travelling by train costs more than flying, the costs for the train journey can be reimbursed. The extent to which this rule currently also applies to employees of the Weizenbaum Institute must be clarified in consultation with the Institute's funders and also depends on the available project budget. The Weizenbaum Institute is working towards a general solution with its funders that will align with the legislation of the Climate Protection Programme 2030 and comparable regulations.

As already described: Business trips are essential in day-to-day research. The following points are therefore intended to highlight strategies that every employee can use to plan an upcoming business trip with sustainability in mind.

- \ Firstly, we recommend using FlyingLess portal, which contains numerous approaches and ideas for reducing flight emissions in the academic sector. Everyone should question if a meeting requiring travel can be meaningfully translated into a virtual meeting. If the answer to this question is yes, a virtual meeting is preferable.
- \ In general, the goal of sustainable business travel can primarily be achieved by avoiding air travel. Apart from exceptional cases, domestic flights and intra-European flights between destinations that would take less than five hours by train are therefore not covered by the Institute. In this case, only business trips by bus, train, ship or car will be financed. The latter can be a sensible alternative, especially if several employees organise themselves into a car pool.
- \ If travelling by air is absolutely unavoidable, it is important to choose the flight with the lowest CO2 emissions wherever possible. It is worth taking a look at atmosfair's airline index. The Weizenbaum Institute is working to ensure that the CO2 compensation can be covered with travel costs and is discussing this possibility with the institute's financial sponsors.
- \ We aim to determine the volume of travel and the carbon footprint of our business flights. In the future, the following data should be recorded when submitting a business trip to the travel expenses centre: Means of travel, distance, and estimated emissions (the atmosfair calculator is suitable for the latter, for example; the ecopassenger tool for rail and bus journeys). This will give us data on our travel volume which we can use to make recommendations and incentivise future changes

Example: For the research retreats in Stolzenhagen (2018) and Bad Belzig (2019), the Institute offered joint bus journeys in order to avoid individual journeys by car. The location and means of travel were thus not only chosen with

sustainability in mind, but also provided a good opportunity for dialogue between colleagues while en route.

3.6 Governance

A prerequisite for credible sustainability management at the Weizenbaum Institute is compliance with the principles of good and responsible organisation (good governance) and the cross institute integration of these principles. Questions of sustainable governance therefore not only affect the management level at the Weizenbaum Institute, but also play an overarching role at all levels. These questions affect various areas of responsibility, including research, quality management, knowledge and innovation transfer and the provision of scientific expertise for important social challenges.

The first major challenge is to coordinate the diverse perspectives of the various stakeholder groups at the Weizenbaum Institute concerning sustainability issues in order to define concrete tasks, responsibilities and goals and to determine the resources that will be used. The aim is to identify best practices and develop a sustainable governance approach for the Weizenbaum Institute.

- \ We strive for an institute climate in which (a) the institute management supports and actively promotes the sustainability mission statement and takes it into account in fundamental strategic decisions, and (b) as many status groups as possible are involved in coordination and implementation.
- \ Researchers and employees at the Weizenbaum Institute should be involved in organisational development in a variety of ways and play an active role in shaping the institute's culture and structures. Through regular surveys, satisfaction analyses and other dialogue formats, these groups should be able to participate in determining the need for change at the institute, especially with regard to sustainability issues. The results are then documented transparently and communicated accordingly. As a rule, selected researchers and employees are involved in strategic and operational development and implementation on a voluntary basis.
- \ Researchers and employees should become more and more familiar with the topic of sustainability on a permanent basis. To this end, information on sustainability is provided directly during the on-boarding process (e.g. in the handbook for new employees). Additionally, the knowledge and approach of all members of the institute are to be further developed through regular workshops.
- \ Rules and processes relating to the implementation of the sustainability mission statement should be clearly explained and recorded - for example in the form of specific regulations and manuals or more general guidelines, which ideally also list specific processes, responsibilities and contact points. We suggest that target group-orientated guidelines are

developed or concretised by the institute management, working groups (to be initiated if necessary) and / or with the support of external consultants. These guidelines could cover the following areas: Equality and diversity; protection against discrimination, violence and sexual harassment; family-friendly workplace and flexible working hours; good scientific practice and dealing with scientific misconduct; compliance and corruption prevention.

- \ It is essential to consider the issue of sustainable governance as part of the continuation of the Weizenbaum Institute. The integration of research operations into the Weizenbaum-Institut e.V. and the expected increase in the number of employees in administration and research-supporting areas from September 2022 will allow many of the above-mentioned governance issues to be reconsidered and further developed. In the course of this consolidation, for example, the aim is to concretise and expand the tasks and responsibilities in relation to sustainability at the institute and, above all, to anchor them more firmly within the institute's management. The long-term commitment of a larger number of people to the institute can also create new opportunities for organisational development and staff development in terms of social sustainability.

Example: By initiating a sustainability working group that meets regularly and consists of senior scientists and doctoral students as well as employees from the areas supporting science and administration, a comprehensive committee has been created. This committee enables various stakeholders to participate in the (further) development of the Weizenbaum Institute's sustainability mission statement and to provide impetus for its implementation.