



# Polycrisis etc.: How did the world change, and what does it mean for our research?

Some thoughts at the end  
of the WeLaR project

Ursula Holtgrewe, ZSI ([holtgrewe@zsi.at](mailto:holtgrewe@zsi.at))

Contribution to WeLaR Virtual  
Expert Café, July 4th, 12, 2025



Funded by  
the European Union

# The challenges (some of them)

- Massive shifts of societies' sense of relevance and urgency (climate change, war, growth)
- Disruptions and continuities in all the wrong places
- Direct challenges to habitual approaches of applied (European) socio-economic research
  - Normative quasi-concepts in between research and policy
  - assumption of a benevolent and receptive technocracy
- Easy misunderstandings and tempting delusions
  - Confusion of good intentions and impact (magical thinking)
  - Some uncertainty over levels and powers of interventions
- Too much or too little belief in institutions and “systemicity”

# No solutions, but can we as researchers ...



- ... **insist** on evidence-based insights and the possibility of societal/political choices and **understand** ongoing changes (of change)
- ... both **accept and challenge** the slowness, limitations and specific logics of functional systems
- ... **become aware** of our own blind spots and illusions and **retain focus**
- ... **avoid wishful thinking** and allow for some vision ... ???



# References



- White, Jonathan (2024): In the long run: the future as a political idea. Profile
- Nassehi, Armin (2021): Unbehagen. Theorie der überforderten Gesellschaft. Munich: Beck

Reading newspapers, inventing research projects, investigating social innovation, psycho-social risk at work, healthcare

