

Visual Society Program

Design & science & politics & society & economy & education & labor & life chances & markets & decision making & globalization & change & demographics & public & civic engagement & finance & law & migration & diversity & identity & orientation & information & concepts & transformation & visualization

Context

Social inequality, demographic change, participation, the digital revolution, conflicts – our changing society continuously confronts us with new and complex questions. If we want to find answers, we need new methods.

Interdisciplinary cooperation between the social sciences and visual communication has a long and successful tradition. Social scientists generate empirical insights, while graphic designers make complicated subjects transparent and understandable. But the cooperation between the two disciplines has to be developed and expanded to keep up with a society that is changing faster than ever.

The Visual Society Program creates a framework for this cooperation. Social scientists and designers work together and find new methods for exploring and explaining social phenomena.

Collaborators

The "Visuelle Systeme" class is part of the "Visuelle Kommunikation" program at the University of the Arts Berlin (UdK). Taught by Professor David Skopec, Bachelor's and Master's students work on information design, corporate visual identities, and signage systems. The approach is always content-driven and many class projects address topics of current societal relevance.

The WZB Berlin Social Science Center is a non-university research institute which conducts basic research with a focus on problems of modern societies in a globalized world.

The main research areas are: education, work and life opportunities, social inequality, markets and decision making, innovation, the digital revolution, international politics and law, changes in political systems, and diversity and migration. Around 160 researchers work at the WZB, mainly sociologists, political scientists, economists, legal scholars and psychologists.

The program

In the Visual Society Program (ViSoP), design students from the University of the Arts Berlin (UdK) and social scientists from the WZB Berlin Social Science Center work together. The participants get to know the other discipline's research and methods. The goal is to create a better understanding of how to communicate complex topics and to develop common, interdisciplinary approaches to research.

Projects

The ViSoP projects last for at least 12 months. Master's students from the "Visuelle Systeme" class work together with the research units at the WZB. The participants can use the resources of both institutions for their work: the workshops, studios and auditoriums of the UdK, as well as the WZB library, with its extensive social science databases.

Transformation & visualization

There is a long tradition of cooperation between the social sciences and visual communication which is also reflected by visual communication and visual sociology. In the 1920s, the Austrian sociologist Otto Neurath founded the Gesellschafts- und Wirtschaftsmuseum Wien (Vienna Museum for Society and Economy). He developed a unique method for communicating social statistics using pictures and signs.

He also introduced the job of the "transformer" – a person who mediates between scientists and graphic designers. The transformer analyzes empirical data and creates concepts for visualization before the actual graphic design begins. Even when selecting the information, she thinks about how to communicate it.

Today the job of the transformer is performed in equal parts by the scientist and the graphic designer. For scientists, this process of transformation and visualization can create a completely new understanding of their own subject. For the designer, a profound knowledge of the content and its origins can help to generate new ideas.

Potential

ViSoP projects may address any societally relevant topic. Ideas for new projects can come from the WZB or from the design students. The participants decide for themselves which methods and form of presentation (e.g., graphic, film, interaction, exhibition) is best suited to their topic. From a design point of view, it is crucial that the topics are not reduced to "hard facts". These projects will only resonate with a wider audience if their design is inspiring, surprising, and elating. ViSoP aims to open up new perspectives for information design that go far beyond the established genre of "infographics".

Participation

The program is open to all Master's students of the "Visuelle Systeme" class at the UdK. All researchers at the WZB can participate: doctoral candidates, postdocs, and established researchers.

Contact

UdK

ViSoP
c/o Universität der
Künste Berlin

Grunewaldstrasse 2-5,
Medienhaus
10823 Berlin

Prof. David Skopec
T +49 30 318 512 85
ds@udk.berlin.de
www.udk.skopec.com

WZB

ViSoP
c/o Wissenschaftszentrum
Berlin für
Sozialforschung

Reichpietschufer 50
10785 Berlin

Jessica Haase
T +49 30 254 915 36
jessica.haase@wzb.eu
www.wzb.eu