

## **Theories of change in sustainability transitions**

Pressure cooker

University of A Coruña, 10-11<sup>th</sup> of September 2015

*Director:*

***Prof. Ricardo García Mira (University of A Coruña)***

*Coordinators:*

***Adina Dumitru, Ricardo Garcia Mira, Niki Frantzeskaki***

The global dimension of contemporary societal problems such as climate change requires concerted action among different societal actors. Changing our lifestyles, societies and economies in a sustainable direction is possible only through broad consensus on the goals and pace of transformation. As the pace of transitions towards sustainability is not sufficiently swift for achieving radical transformation in a short period of time, mechanisms of acceleration of transformations need to be put in place, that at the same time contribute to social wellbeing and be acceptable to a wide range of actors.

Fast concerted action requires a keen understanding of the role of both individual and collective change agents and the mechanisms underlying their successes or failures in bringing about societal transformation. Both sustainable and social innovation initiatives, political actors and science itself are striving to understand the mechanisms for such transformation and harness their potential. Initiatives endorse certain theories of change as well as beliefs about stability, transformation and the appropriate tools to achieve their goals, and these are likely to play a significant role in their ultimate effectiveness. Furthermore, different scientific approaches to sustainable transformations hold different assumptions on how transformation takes place and they take different perspectives on the role of agency in these processes. This symposium will aim to gather together these different perspectives as they are reflected in 5 European projects and analyse the interplay of both scientific and initiatives' theories of change, processes of individual and collective agency and mechanisms by which effective societal transformation is achieved.

Research has long shown that people hold lay or implicit theories about themselves, others and the world at large, resulting in selective frameworks guiding perceptions and interpretations of events in the world, decision-making and action. These frameworks then become real in their effects through complex interactions within different social groups and systems, and amplified through shared discourses within the networks in which we are embedded. As a result of these processes, our theories also undergo transformation, as people adapt them to fit their observations about the effectiveness of certain types of actions to achieve goals (Landau et al., 2014).

Our implicit theories are motivated by a need to adapt to our complex physical and social environments and organize our actions in meaningful ways. They are also a result of our capacity for agency, by which we are “producers of experiences and shapers of events” (Bandura, 2000). The effective exercise of agency is considered a key determinant of individual or societal transformation and the concept has been used with somewhat elusive meanings in different disciplines. Furthermore, recent conceptualizations of psychological agency have moved away from considering it a fixed entity related to free will, to define it as an affective, embodied and relational processing of human experience (Frie, 2008).

Besides the individual processes of agency, the complex nature of societal challenges of inequality, poverty and climate change, together with the growing interdependence of human communities require a sense of collective agency, which is a determinant of collective action and relies on shared beliefs in the power to produce effects through collective action (Bandura, 2000). *However, beyond this belief, different societal actors might hold different implicit and explicit theories about how personal and collective transformation occurs, by what means and which are the relevant actors and their roles in these processes.* Much less is known about how these theories are articulated in different societal initiatives that aim at fostering sustainable transitions or produce social innovations, how they interact with dominant social narratives and discourses, how they position themselves in relationship to these, and how they change over time through the positive and negative experiences of the networks in achieving their goals. Furthermore, little is known about both the internal and external processes through which networks manage to maintain a sense of collective efficacy, empowerment and identity and about the role these factors play in processes of societal transformation.

Scientific theorizing has also aimed to uncover the trajectories sustainability and social innovation initiatives follow in their efforts to achieve transformation, the motivations underlying individuals’ involvement in such processes, the patterns of interactions between individual and collective agency on the one hand and existing systemic factors constraining or facilitating their action on the other. Science itself has become an actor in processes of societal transformation and bringing together

different theoretical knowledge and empirical results on how scientific theories define transformation, how these definitions drive their search for evidence and how they interact with other dominant societal discourses will undoubtedly provide a rich space for discussion and analysis of agency and transformation.

The present symposium will thus aim at addressing several questions:

What theories of change do initiatives hold and how do they influence their action and experience?

What do different pathways of transition to sustainable societies reveal about mechanisms of large-scale societal change and what is the role of different types of actors in these processes?

How do these theories of change play out in processes of collective agency and empowerment?

How does the situated yet global nature of these networks influence their theories of change and experience of societal transformation?

How do scientific theories interact with dominant societal narratives of change and with the initiatives' theories?

What is the role of individual agents in processes of societal transformation?

What is the meaning of individual and collective agency and their relationship to empowerment in these processes?

If agency is a relational process, what factors need to be in place to promote relationships that lead to empowerment and a feeling of collective agency?

How do processes of human needs for coherence and stability play out within initiatives and networks and what effects do they have for societal transformation efforts?

How do theories of change influence agents' personal and collective identities?

The symposium will gather representatives of 6 European projects studying processes of social innovation and sustainable transition initiatives and their impact on large-scale societal transformation that would tackle global problems such as climate change. They all study a variety of initiatives and networks across Europe and beyond and look at processes of change and the role of these and other agents in bringing it about. They use different scientific theories to tackle these issues and interact with a variety of theories of change that the initiatives themselves hold. A wealth of empirical results will shed light on the questions outlined above and will configure a kaleidoscopic view of the interplay of theories of change, processes of agency and societal transformation outcomes.

## THEORIES OF CHANGE IN SUSTAINABILITY TRANSITIONS

### II PRESSURE COOKER, A Coruña

#### Agenda

Thursday, the 10<sup>th</sup> of September

**14:30-15:00** Welcome and coffee

**15:00-15:20** Welcome and objectives of the workshop – Ricardo García Mira

**15:20-15:30** Round of introductions

**15:30-16:00** “Towards a European socio-ecological transition”

Domenico Rossetti di Valdalbero, PhD

*DG Research and Innovation*

**16:00-16:10** Sustainable lifestyles and a green economy: the GLAMURS project (short overview)

Ricardo García Mira

*University of A Coruña*

**16:10-16:25** “Theories of change in sustainability transitions: the role of individual and collective agency”

Adina Dumitru, Ricardo García Mira

*University of A Coruña*

**16:25-16:45** “Time Use, Energy Consumption and Lifestyle Changes”

Malik Çürük, Sjak Smulders

*University of Tilburg*

**16:45-17:15** Sustainability journeys: ARTS, TESS and PATHWAYS (short overviews)

Niki Frantzeskaki, *Dutch Research Institute for Transitions*

Anne Holsten, *Postdam Institute for Climate Impact Research*

Andries Hof, *PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency*

**17:15 – 17:35 “Accelerating sustainability transitions: A comparative analysis of evidence from four city-regions”**

M. Egerman, F. Ehnert, N. Frantzeskaki, F. Kern

*Leibniz Institute of Ecological Urban and Regional Development, Dutch Research Institute for Transitions, & University of Sussex – SPRU*

**17:35-18:00 Coffee break & Poster session:**

*Theories of change in sustainability and social innovation initiatives*

**18:00-18:40 Discussants Inputs**

*Food for thought: Sense of place and agency in sustainability transitions*

**Richard Stedman** (Cornell University)

Time Use, Energy Consumption and Lifestyle Changes

Discussants: **Tim O’Riordan** (University of East Anglia), **Andries Hof** (PBL, Netherlands)

Accelerating sustainability transitions: A comparative analysis of evidence from four city-regions

Discussants: **Tony Craig** (James Hutton Institute), **Heleen de Coninck** (Radboud University)

**18:40-19:20 Small group discussions**

**Friday, the 11<sup>th</sup> of September**

**09:30-9:50 Innovation journeys: TRANSIT; EUInnovate (short overviews)**

Alex Haxeltine, *University of East Anglia*

Simon Dolan, *ESADE, Ramon Llull University*

**09:50-10:10 "Narratives of Change on Transformative Social Innovation"**

Flor Avelino

*Dutch Research Institute for Transitions*

**10:10-10:30 "Culture reengineering in view of promoting sustainable innovation: Reflections based on the future of Work and EU-Innovate accumulated experience"**

Simon Dolan

*ESADE, Ramon Llull University*

**10:30 – 10:45 "Agency and Transitions: An Agent-Based Social Simulation Perspective"**

Tony Craig

*James Hutton Institute*

**10:45-11:25 Discussants input**

Narratives of Change on Transformative Social Innovation

Discussants: **Liz Dinnie** (James Hutton Institute), **Giovanni Caiati** (Laboratory for Citizen Science)

Culture reengineering in view of promoting sustainable innovation: Reflections based on the future of Work and EU-Innovate accumulated experience

Discussants: **Walter Wehrmeyer** (University of Surrey), **Niki Frantzeskaki** (DRIFT)

Agency and Transitions: An Agent-based social simulation perspective

Discussants: **Georg Holtz** (Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy), **Gil Penha Lopez** (University of Lisbon).

**11:25-12:10** Small group discussion

**12:10 – 12:30** Coffee break

**12:30-12:50** Plenary: collection of critical inputs and agenda points

12:50-13:10 “**Bridging integrated assessment modelling, the multi-level perspective and initiative-based learning: Lessons from the Dutch land-use domain**”

Holger Berg, Joyce Zwartkruis and Andries Hof

*Wuppertal Institute, Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency*

13:10-13:30 "**Revolution or evolution: What happened to conflict in sustainability transitions?**"

Liz Dinnie

*James Hutton Institute*

13:30-14:00 **Discussants input**

Bridging integrated assessment modelling, the multi-level perspective and initiative-based learning: Lessons from the Dutch land-use domain

Discussants: *Alex Haxeltine* (University of East Anglia), *Anne Holsten* (Postdam Institute for Climate Impact Research)

Revolution or evolution: what happened to conflict in sustainability transitions?

Discussants: *Richard Stedman* (Cornell University), *Flor Avelino* (DRIFT)

14:00-15:30 *Lunch*

15:30-16:00 **Biodiversity and energy transitions: MILESECURE, BIOMOT, SIMWOOD (short overviews)**

Giovanni Caiati, Marino Bonaiuto, Fátima Cruz

*Laboratory of Citizenship Sciences (Italy), Sapienza University of Rome (Italy) & University of Valladolid (Spain)*

16:00-16:20 “**The rise of human factor: a lead role in the change of energy systems**”

Giovanni Caiati

*Laboratory of Citizenship Sciences, Italy*

16:20-16:35 **Discussants input**

The rise of human factor: a lead role in the change of energy systems

Discussants: **Holger Berg** (Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy), **Bonno Pel** (Université Libre de Bruxelles).

16:35-17:15 Small group discussion: The methods corner

17:15-17:30 *Coffee break*

17:30-17:50 Plenary discussion

17:50-18:10 Wrapping up and next steps

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