

Innovating academia?

Reflections on researching social innovation for transformation

Dr. Julia Wittmayer

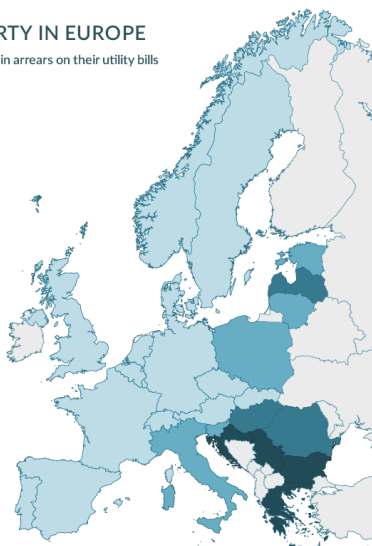
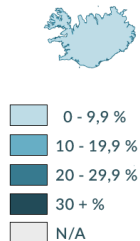
DRIFT, Erasmus University Rotterdam
wittmayer@drift.eur.nl

date / location

September 17th, 2024
Hochschulkonferenz: Die Rolle von Hochschulen
und wissenschaftlichen Einrichtungen im Ökosystem
Sozialer Innovationen
Dortmund, Germany

ENERGY POVERTY IN EUROPE

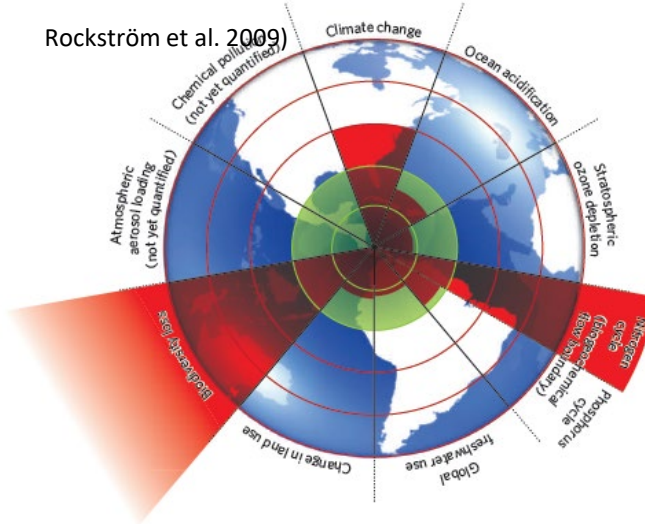
Percentage of population in arrears on their utility bills



Data: Eurostat

© 1-Stromvergleich.de

Rockström et al. 2009)



Persistent problems:

- complex,
- uncertain,
- difficult to manage,
- hard to grasp

(Rotmans 2005)

Transitions

- **long-term** process (1-2 generations, 20-50 years)
- radical and structural change in cultures, structures, practices
- **system level** (e.g. sector, city, region)
- high levels of complexity and uncertainty

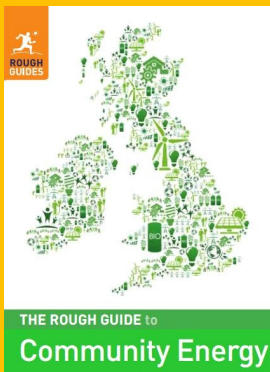


“radical transformation towards a sustainable society as a response to a number of persistent problems confronting contemporary modern societies”

(Grin et al. 2010:1)

drift

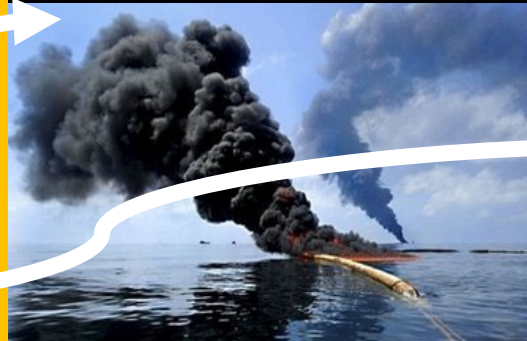
for transition



innovations are transformative to the extent that they

- **challenge**
- **alter**
- **replace**

dominant structures & institutions



Russia-Ukraine War

Explore the free research collection



The Global Economic Crisis

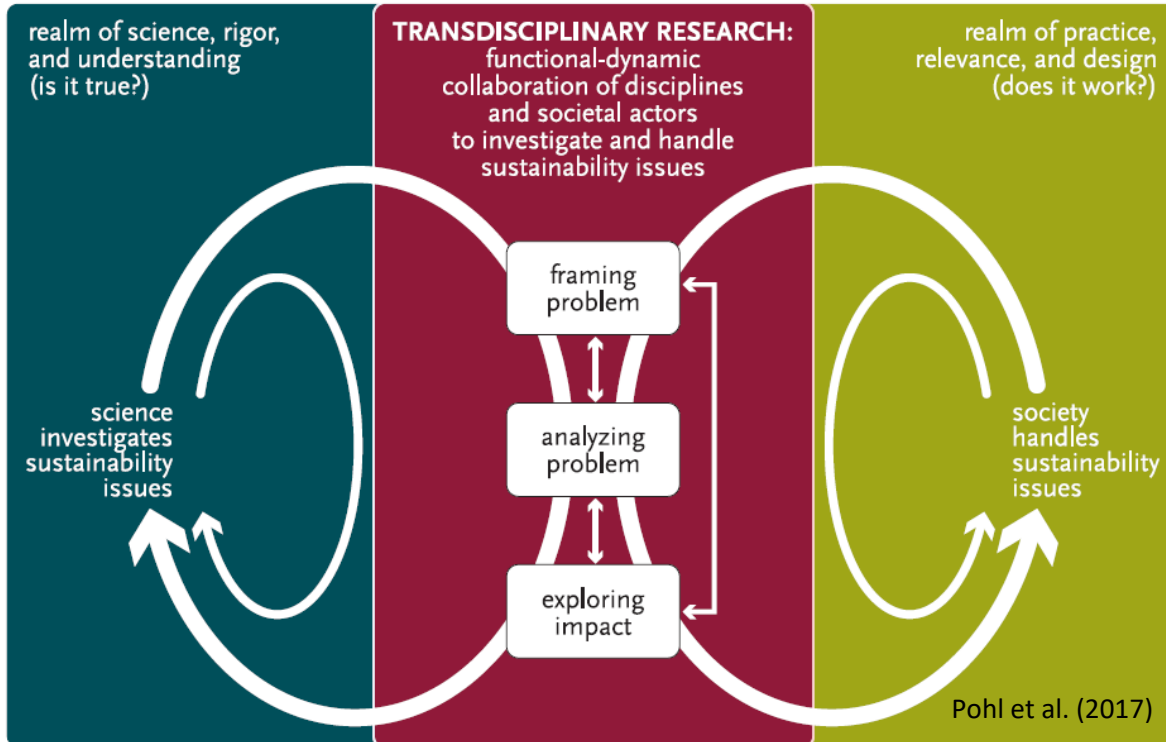
The Great Depression of the XXI Century



*Avelino et al. 2017
Haxeltine et al. 2017*

Process-oriented research for social innovation

Transdisciplinary research



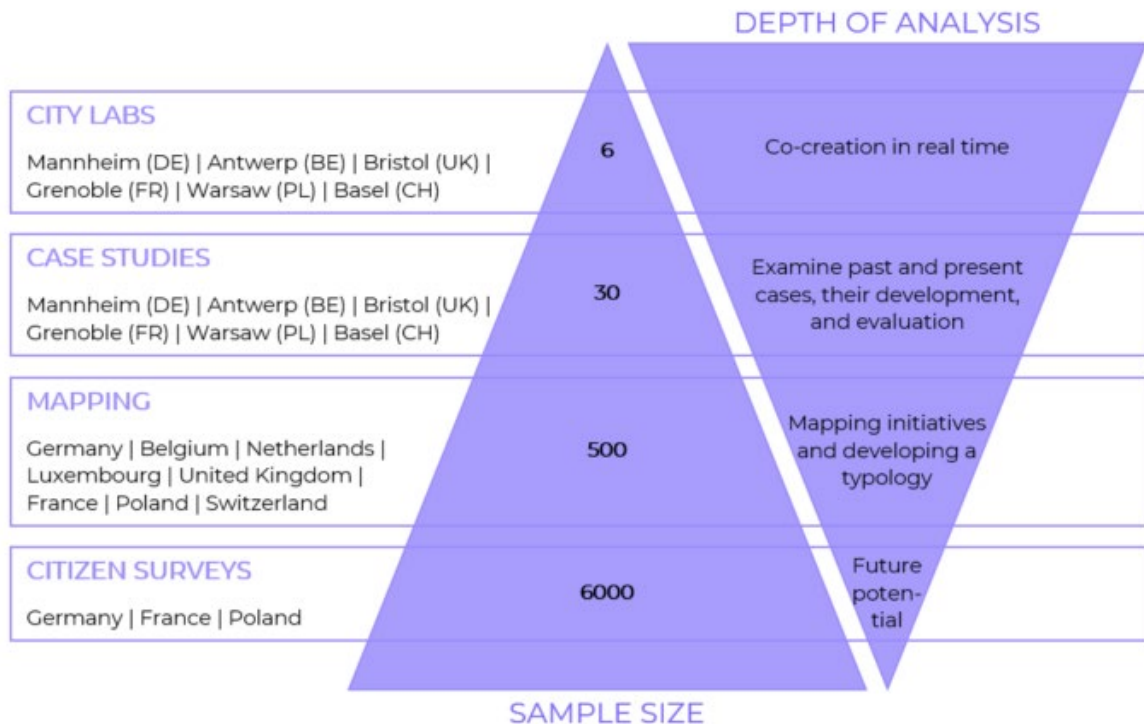
Transdisciplinarity is a reflexive, integrative, method driven scientific principle

aiming at the solution or transition of societal problems and concurrently of related scientific problems

by differentiating and integrating knowledge from various scientific and societal bodies of knowledge.
(Lang et al. 2012, p.26/27)



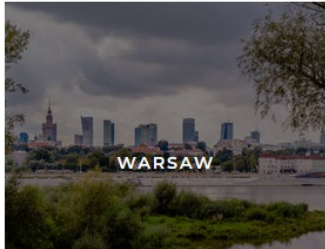
SOcial
INNovation
in **E**nergy
Transitions



SONNET's overall aim was to generate novel understandings of the *diversity, processes and contributions* of social innovation in the energy sector, and critically evaluate and assess their *success and future potential* towards supporting sustainable transitions of energy systems.



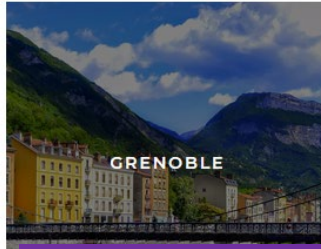
Build capacity in local government for social innovation



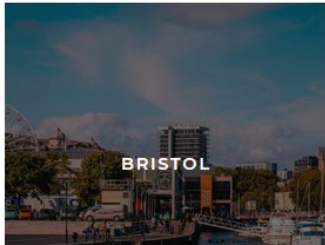
Addressing energy efficiency governance



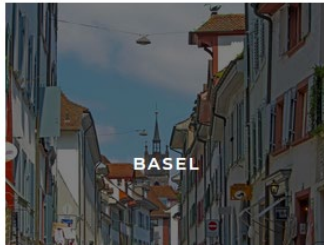
Speeding up the local energy transition



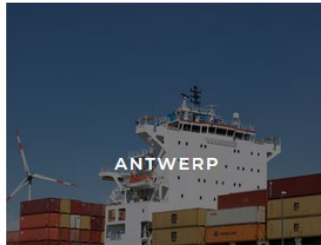
Addressing energy consumption



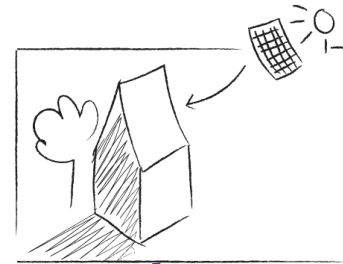
Addressing energy retrofitting/financing



Addressing energy consumption



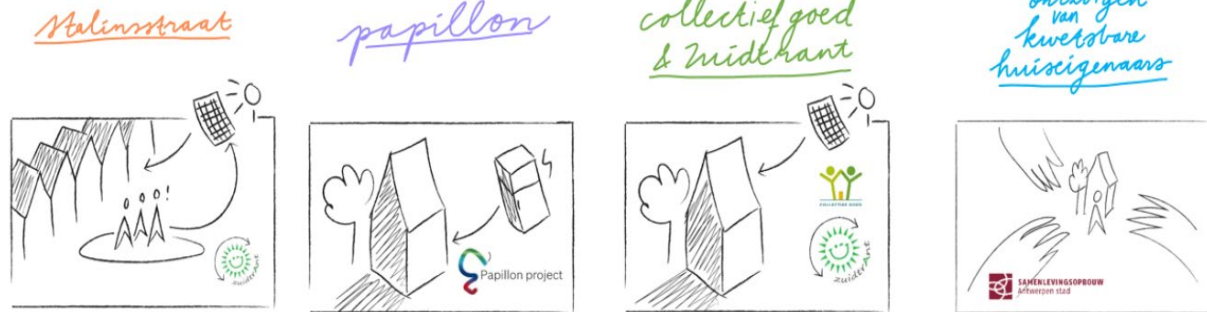
Addressing energy poverty



Supporting learning processes in addressing societal challenges through reflexive monitoring

Antwerp address energy poverty and foster just energy transition: Networks and learning

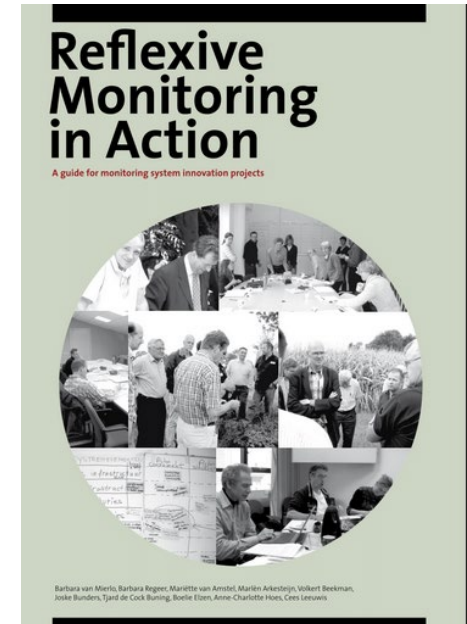
Gelyksmoom



Reflexive Monitoring

Research: How did learning take place in a process of experimentation for energy justice in Antwerp and to what extent was reflexivity triggered?

Learning by doing through four experiments & reflexive monitoring (field diaries, dynamic learning agenda, learning sessions, ...)



Dark and bright sides of social innovations

Dark and bright sides in relation to in/justices of some sort or along certain standards of justice

For example, **renewable energy prosumerism**:

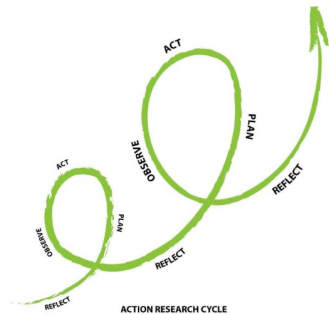
- Reconciling logics vs. Commercialization
- Energy democracy vs. Exclusion
- Autonomy vs. Instrumentalization
- Small is beautiful vs. Projectification
- Active citizenship & empowerment vs. Responsibilization and overburdening
- ...

Action research

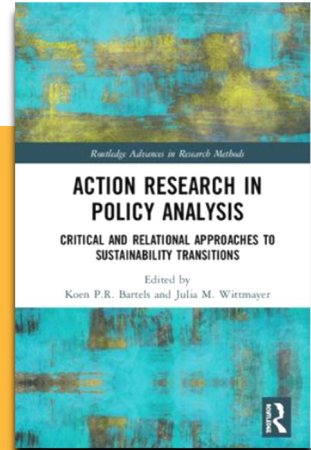
Striving for:
enhancement of human flourishing, emancipation,
democracy and the empowerment of those involved
(Greenwood and Levin 2007, Reason and Bradbury 2008).



Action research seeks **transformative change** through the simultaneous process of taking **action** and doing **research** which are linked together by **critical reflection**.
(AR podcast, episode 1)

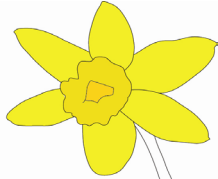
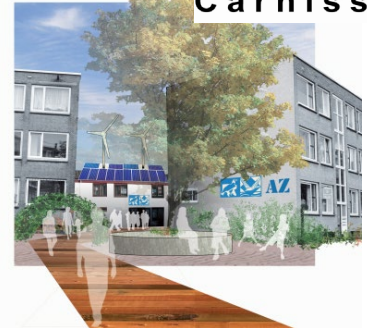


“critical and relational **processes** through which researchers and their co-inquirers aim to **collaboratively** produce scientifically and socially relevant **knowledge** and transformative **action**”
(Bartels & Wittmayer, 2018, p4).



Strengthen local resilience

- **City:** Framing problems, finding direction, empower community, getting into action (addressing recent closure of a community centre)
- **Research:** Local governance of transitions



Bloeiend
Carnisse



Support transition processes & experimentation with self-governance

Figure 1: Timeline of the transition management process in Carnisse

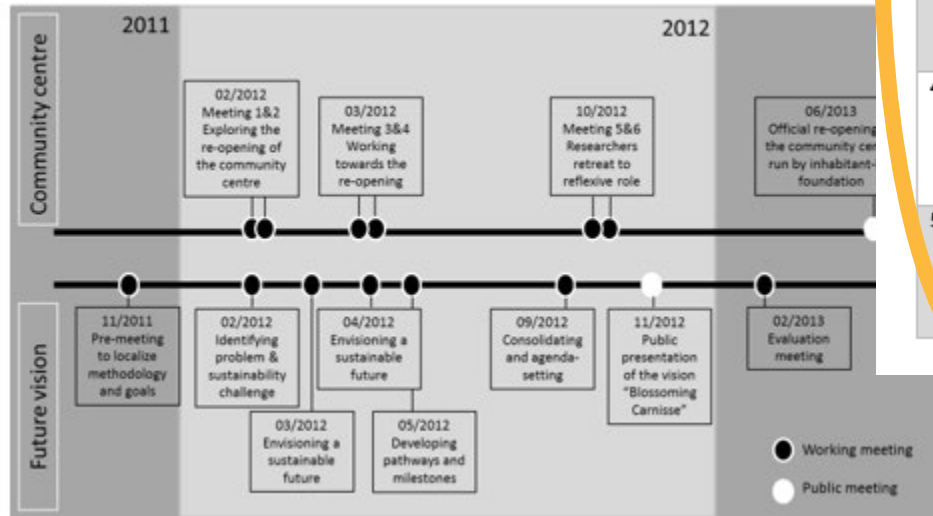
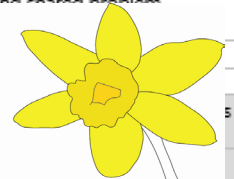


Table 5: Phases of the community arena (Source: Wittmayer et al. 2011a: 29-30; * meeting)

	Key activities	Key output
0. Pre-preparation	A. Case orientation	A. Initial case description for each pilot
	B. Transition team formation	B. Transition team
1. Preparation & Exploration	A. Process design	A. Community Arena process plan
	B. System analysis	B. Insightful overview of major issues/tensions to focus on
	C. Actor analysis (long-list and short-list of relevant actors) incl. interviews	C. Actor identification and categorisation + insight inner context
	D. Set up Monitoring framework	D. Monitoring framework
2. Problem structuring & Envisioning	A. Community arena formation	A. Frontrunner network
	B. Participatory problem structuring*	B. Individual and shared problem perception
	C. Selection of key priorities	C. Guiding principles
	D. Participatory vision building*	D. Individual and shared vision
3. Backcasting, Pathways & Agenda Building	A. Participatory backcasting* & definition of transition paths	A. Backcasting
	B. Formulation agenda and specific activities*	B. Transition agenda
	C. Monitoring interviews	C. Monitoring framework
4. Experimenting & Implementing	A. Dissemination of visions, pathways and agenda	A. Experimentation
	B. Coalition forming & broadening network	B. Network, or local
	C. Conducting experiments	C. Experimentation
5. Monitoring & Evaluation	A. Participatory evaluation of method content and process*	A. Evaluation
	B. Monitoring interviews	B. Monitoring framework

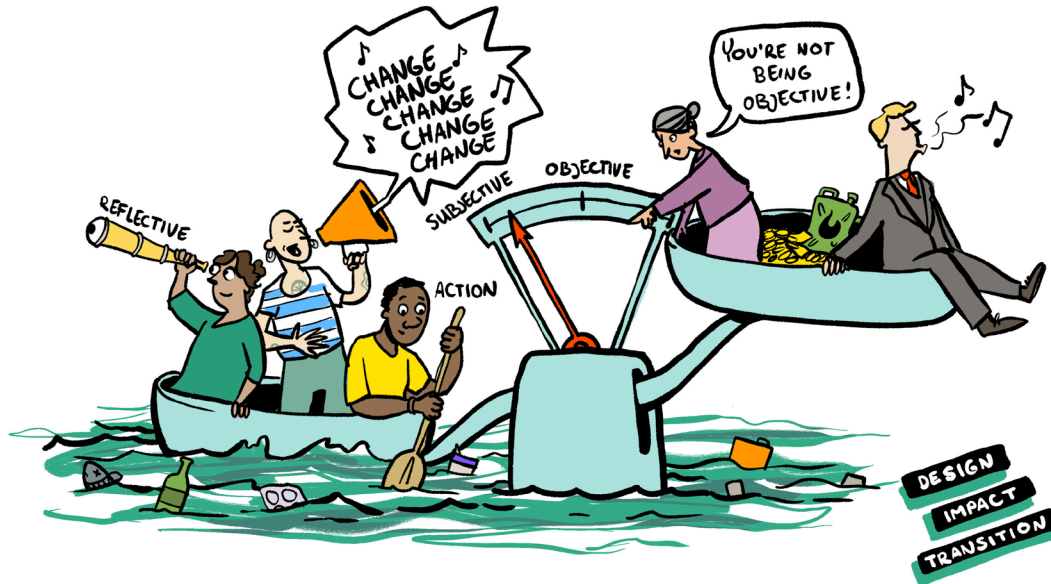


Bloeiend Carnisse



Pursuing such research means...

TRANSFORMATIVE ACADEMICS



... running into challenges

Epistemological challenges:

Related to nature, origin, scope and understandability of our co-produced knowledge

Methodological challenges

Related to how to co-produce scientifically valid and socially robust knowledge

Personal, social and political challenges

Related to personal and societal values and norms of how research is done, power dynamics and agendas

Institutional challenges

Related to how formal and informal institutions in academia work

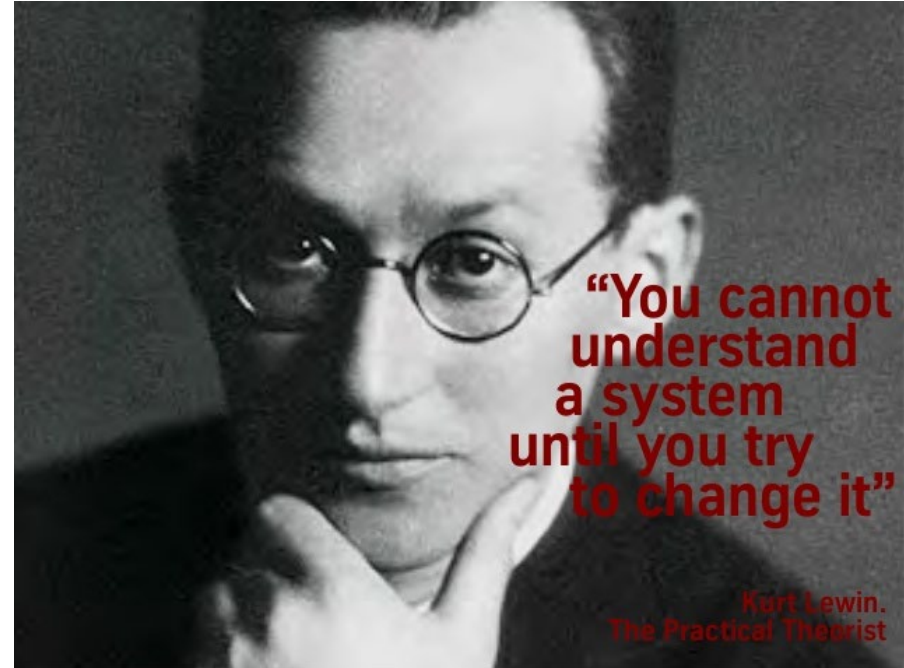
Rethinking who you are as researcher



Degrees of engagement, action and normativity

*“even though many researchers are undoubtedly perfectly capable of **separating their double roles**, it is well imaginable that this **double role can obscure the analysis**. The involvement with a policy practice or innovation project can possibly function as an **impediment for a realistic analysis** of the process. It makes it hard to make ‘honest’ claims about the role that the researcher himself has played in the process”*

(Duineveld et al. 2007: 26)





Commentary

From academic to political rigour: Insights from the 'Tarot' of transgressive research



Leah Temper^{a,*}, Dylan McGarry^b, Lena Weber^c
the Resilience Alliance.

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McGowan, K. A., F. Westley, E. D. G. Fraser, P. A. Loring, K. C. Weathers, F. Avelino, J. Sendzimir, R. Roy Chowdhury, and M.-L. Moore. 2014. The research journey: travels across the idiomatic and axiomatic toward a better understanding of complexity. *Ecology and Society* 19(3): 37. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5751/ES-06518-190337>



Sustainability Science (2020) 15:467–484
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-019-00757-x>

SPECIAL FEATURE: ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Exploring the Transformative Capacity of Place-Shaping Practices

Operationalising transformative sustainability science through place-based research: the role of researchers

Lummina G. Horlings^{1,2} · Marta Nieto-Romero^{3,5} · Siri Pisters^{4,5} · Katriina Soini⁴

Sustainability Science
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-021-00938-7>

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Conflicting roles of researchers in sustainability transitions: balancing action and reflection

Ellen Bulten¹ · Laurens K. Hessels^{2,3} · Michaela Hordijk⁴ · Andrew J. Segrave⁵

Synthesis

The research journey: travels across the idiomatic and axiomatic toward a better understanding of complexity

[Katharine A. McGowan](#)¹, [Frances Westley](#)¹, [Evan D. G. Fraser](#)², [Philip A. Loring](#)³, [Kathleen C. Weathers](#)⁴, [Flor Avelino](#)⁵, [Jan Sendzimir](#)⁶, [Rinku Roy Chowdhury](#)⁷ and [Michele-Lee Moore](#)⁸

Sustain Sci (2014) 9:483–496
DOI 10.1007/s11625-014-0258-4



ORIGINAL ARTICLE



Action, research and participation: roles of researchers in sustainability transitions

Julia M. Wittmayer · Niko Schöpke

Roles of researchers

3 Knowledge Broker

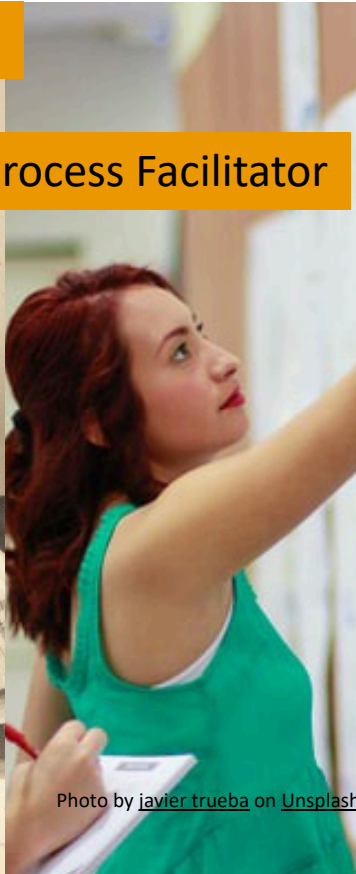
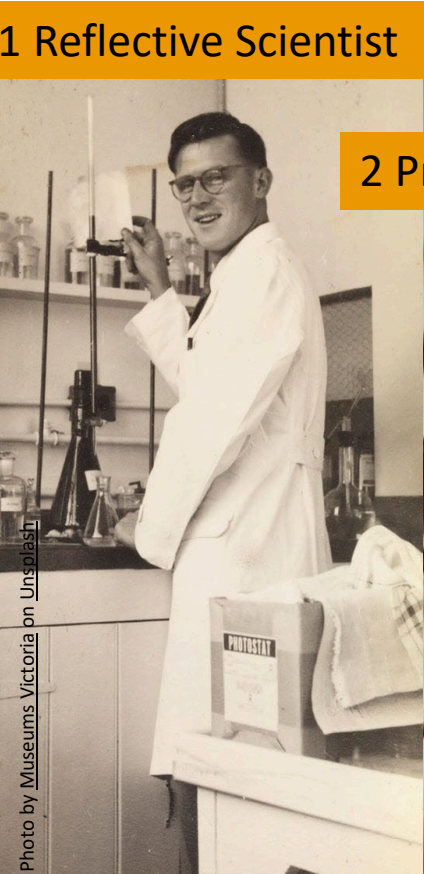
5 Reflexive Scientist

1 Reflective Scientist

2 Process Facilitator

4 Change Agent

(6 Project Manager)



Changes over time

Fig. 1. The research landscape.

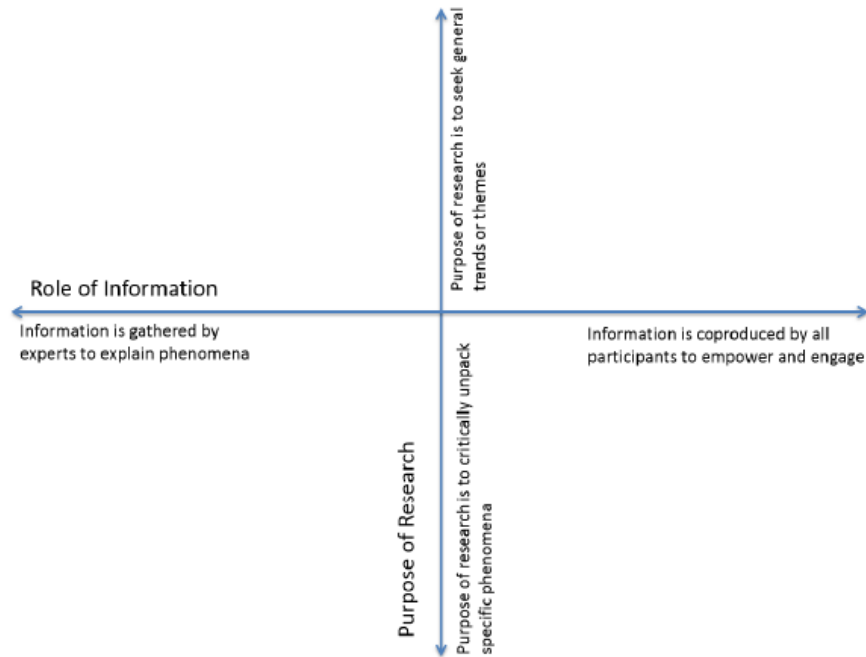
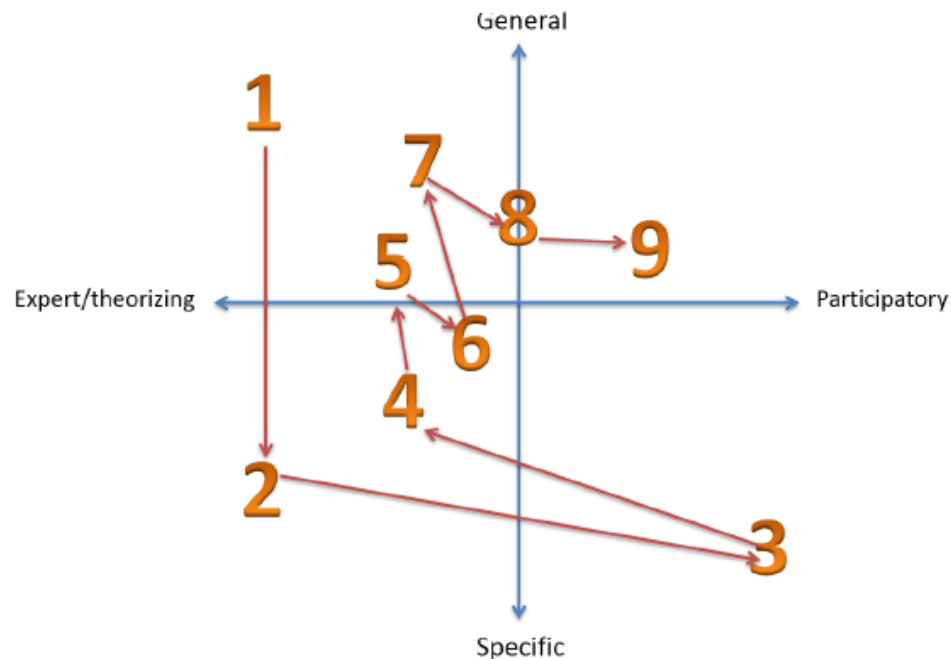
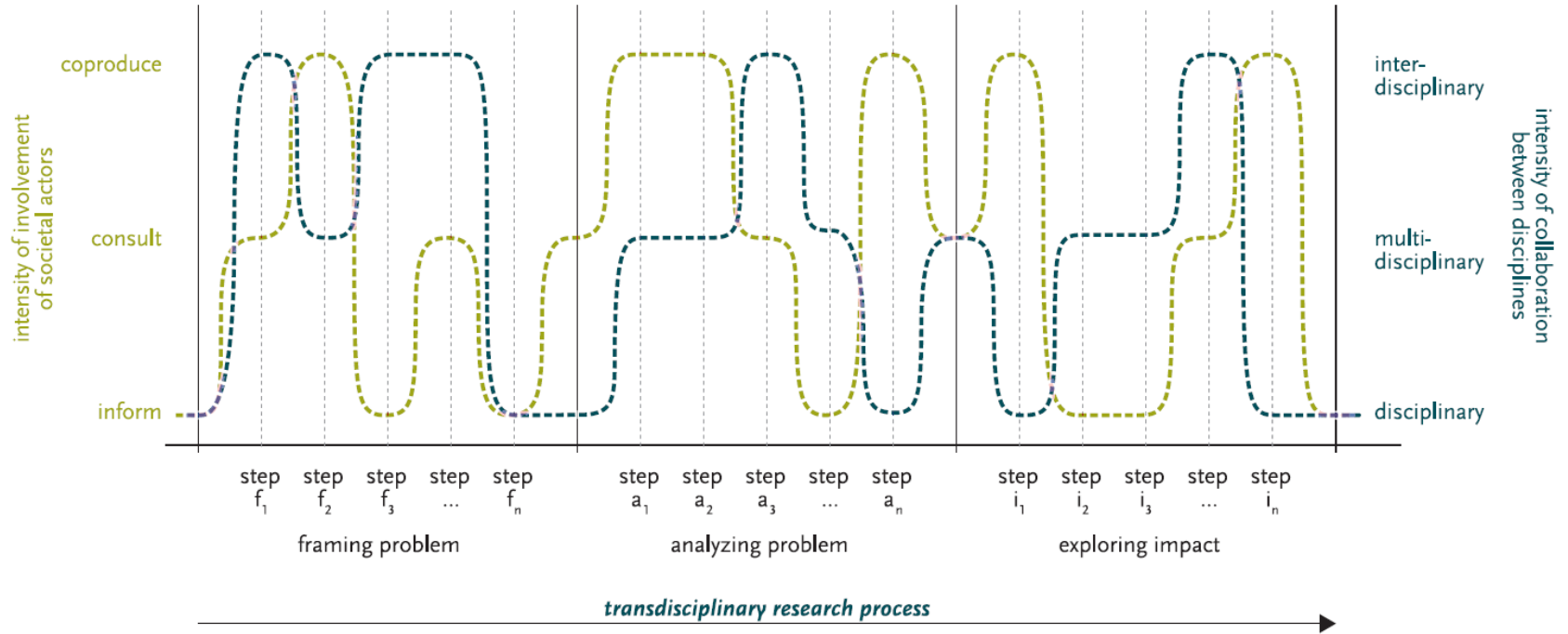


Fig. 8. Avelino's research journey.



'Functional-dynamic science-practice collaboration'



But also: Calls for academic system & universities to become **more societally 'relevant'**

Institutional challenges ...

- Focus on efficiency
- Narrow (quantifiable) performance metrics
- International competition

- Focus on scientific excellence
- Disciplinary boundaries, standards and norms

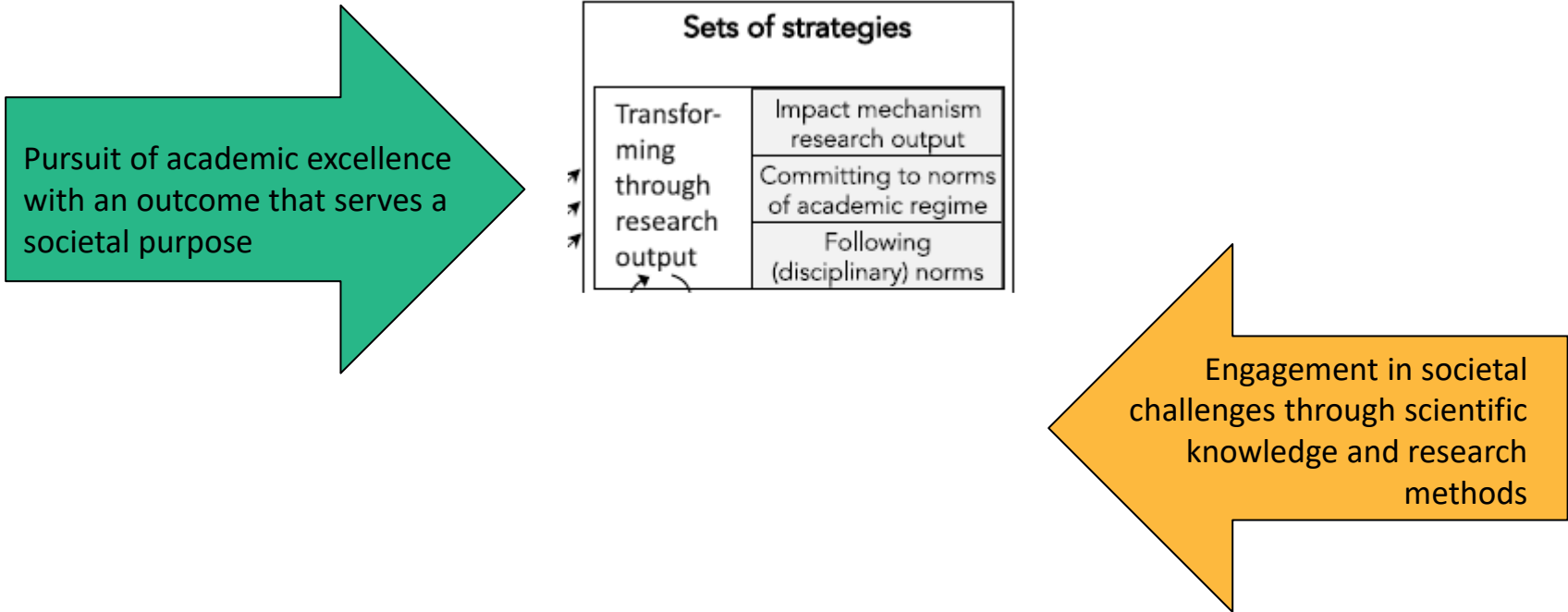
- Rigid career paths
- Strong division between academic and professional staff
- Lack of commitment from key decision makers
-

CREATING
POSITIVE
SOCIETAL
IMPACT

THE ERASMIAN WAY

Strategy 2024

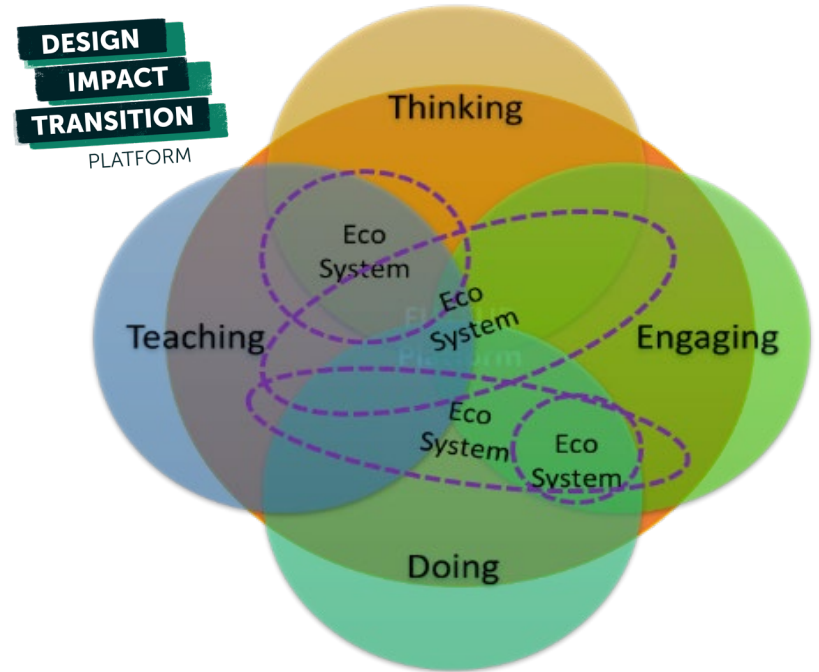
It is not that we are not dealing with those....



Social innovation in academia

Build capacity at universities for social innovation

“to empower radically new ways to do research, education and engagement for a just and sustainable future”



Transformative Research Principles



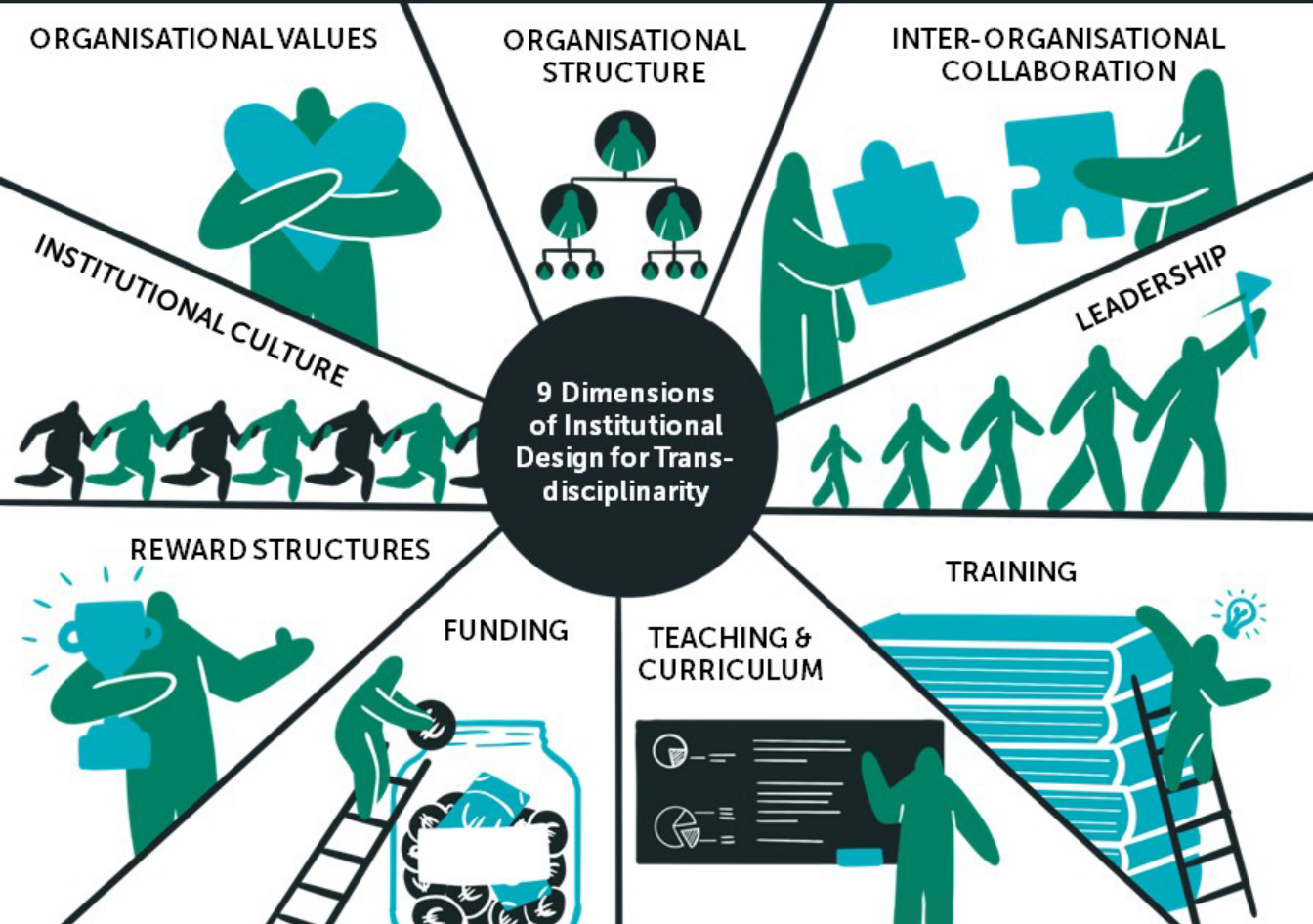
DESIGN
IMPACT
TRANSITION
PLATFORM

**Transformative Research:
Knowledge and action for
just sustainability transitions**

DIT working paper 1, 2021

Julia Wittmayer, Derk Loorbach, Kristina Bogner, Yogi Hendlin, Katharina Hölscher, Mariangela Lavanga, Ana Vasques, Timo von Wirth, Marieke de Wal

INSTITUTIONALISATION OF TRANSDISCIPLINARITY IN RESEARCH ORGANISATIONS



9 key dimensions that influence the institutionalization of transdisciplinary work.: that is the *enabling* and *hindering* factors for transdisciplinary work within research institutions.

Williams et al. 2024

DESIGN
IMPACT
TRANSITION
PLATFORM

Institutionalisation of Transdisciplinarity in Research Organisations – A Review of Key Dimensions

DIT Working Paper 2, 2024

Rachel Williams, Julia M. Wittmayer, Niko Schöpke, Mark Lawrence, Derk Loorbach

Alternative career paths



Oliver Bream McIntosh

Transformative Research
Developer

ESSB HR Pilot: Two preliminary *Impact Profiles* and additional considerations
Societal impact of university research and education comes in many flavors. The request to create dedicated impact

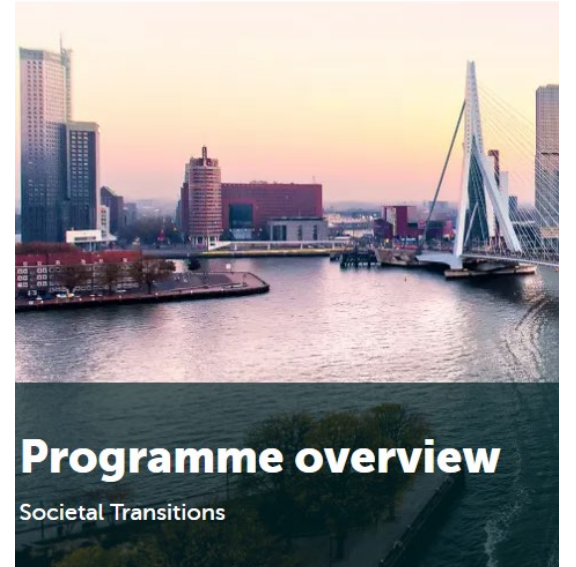
Alternative funding schemes



Alternative education: MA Societal Transitions

Erasmus University Rotterdam

Education ▾ Research ▾ About EUR ▾ Working at ▾



The study programme in a nutshell



As part of a broader movement



slow *science*

Publish *plenty premature papers*, or *perish preparing principled progress*?



OPEN SCIENCE

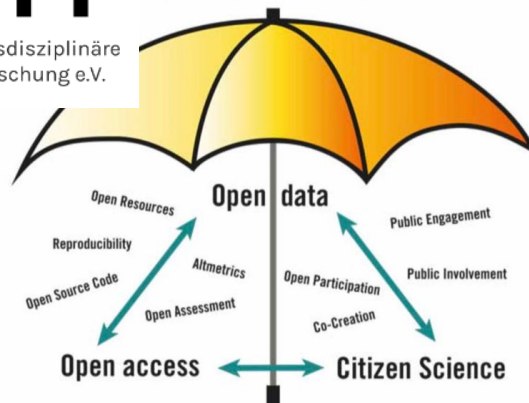


Illustration: Lotta Tomasson/VA CC BY-NC 2.0

The Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) recognizes the need to improve the ways in which researchers and the outputs of scholarly research are evaluated.

Alt-Ac

Careers and Scholarship Beyond the Tenure Track

FORUM DECOLONIZING ACADEMIA

Call for Participation: „Decolonize Academia!“
Ringvorlesung im Wintersemester 2022/23

Process-oriented research for social innovation

- To support the emergence and development of social innovation and enhance their transformative potential:
 - Build local resilience
 - Build capacity in local government for social innovation
 - Build capacity in universities for social innovation
 - *Also: Build a movement of movements*
 - *with open critical eyes*
- As a social innovation itself
- Runs into problems and challenges: epistemological, methodological, personal and institutional
- Necessitates university transformation



Reminder: co-producing realities

“The point is that reflection on social processes (theories and observations about them) continually enter into, become disentangled with and re-renter the universe of events that they describe”

(Giddens, 1984, p. xxxii–xxxiii)



Thank you!

Dr. Julia Wittmayer
wittmayer@drift.eur.nl
@drifteur





If you are interested (and I very much hope you are), the thematic scope of your contribution could include

(international) insights and learnings from transdisciplinary social innovation research,
and the (changing) role of science and scientists in transdisciplinary projects.

It could also be a reflection on what science can do to (help) develop, test and sustain social innovations,

and on the current obstacles in the system of science.