

RSA Research Network

Governing the Sustainability Transition

– Defining Challenges and Opportunities for the Regional Scale –

CALL FOR PAPERS

Second Workshop

How to govern fundamental Sustainability Transition processes?

10-11 July 2014

University of St. Gallen, Switzerland

In order to achieve sustainable development, large socio-technical systems must be remodelled, implying fundamental transformation processes for technologies, industries and lifestyles. Although the relatively young research fields of Sustainability Transitions and Transition Management have already produced a substantial body of literature (e.g. Geels 2005; Meadowcroft 2009; Grin, Rotmans and Schot 2010; Frantzeskaki, Loorbach and Meadowcroft 2012), the spatial aspects of this transition have so far been little investigated by researchers (e.g. Bulkeley et al. 2010, Späth and Rohrer 2010; Hodson and Marvin 2012; Truffer and Coenen 2012). Given the scale advantage of a regional-based analysis – whereby sufficient detail is combined with a broader strategic perspective – the Regional Studies Association Research Network seeks to explore questions and challenges around the governance of the postulated Transition from a regional perspective.

The focus of this second workshop is how to govern the sustainability transition. While such transition will impact diverse scales from the very local to the global scale, the focus here is on the regional scale. The main challenge is to determine how best to govern and steer these inter-scalar efforts and the impact chains that feed up and down the scalar hierarchy. The governing or political steering of fundamental transition processes poses various challenges: the formation and regulation of complex societal processes, the development of a 'transformative literacy' (Schneidewind 2013) as well as the creation of diverse instruments such as:

- Discursive Instruments, for example to shape normative discourses and to facilitate interplay between different actors with their own specific and inherent 'logic';
- Analytical instruments, for example to enable forecasting, risk assessment and impact analysis;
- Instruments for intervention in order to influence the behaviour of all actors concerned.

There are a number of very different approaches to sustainability transition such as (informal) learning, transdisciplinarity or system dynamics modelling. One question which must be answered is how the globally-endorsed normative concept of sustainability can help guide political and societal efforts to develop resilience against the unwanted impacts of transformation processes such as globalisation, urbanisation, climate and demographic change. It is against this background that the conference focuses on the issues of governance and steering.

At the second workshop we intend to explore this topic by inviting empirical, methodological and conceptual papers as well as posters which address one or more of the following questions, in particular with a regional backdrop:

- *How is sustainability defined and how is the sustainability transition currently governed or managed?*
Who defines sustainability? How is sustainability operationalized? How do we move from sustainability as a value, undermined by interpretative vagueness, to a set of concrete goals and targets to be achieved? Who defines the transition agenda? Which are the dominant political forces? Who is responsible for the prevailing normative discourse on sustainability and how can this discourse be redesigned? How can the normative background of science be taken into account? How can we identify the drivers of spontaneous change as well as the factors of resistance to necessary change? What is the best way to deal with diverse planning cultures in different countries and regulatory contexts? How do we know that the outcome of a proposed strategy / programme / measure actually promotes sustainability?
- *What are the limits and challenges of current governance and management practices?*
As institutional responsibilities often do not fit the problem space, which processes of rescaling are needed? How can we deal with discrepancies such as political versus bureaucratic approaches (i.e. the short term vs. the long term) or centralised versus decentralised solutions (i.e. different mode of intervention)? How do we anticipate possible trajectories of future development? How can transdisciplinary approaches be utilised (i.e. challenge-led approaches)?
- *And how can we better manage the interplay between government and governance processes?*
Who should govern for whom? What is the role of different players such as economic actors, NGOs, scientific actors, civil society etc.? As governance takes place in the 'shadow of hierarchy', which kind of hierarchical steering is needed to enable and complement governance processes? Could education, participation or informal collective learning help?

Of course, we also invite any other papers that address the topic of sustainability transition from a local and regional perspective.

A particular aim of the workshop series is to further develop the conceptual and analytical groundwork for the investigation of prospective regional development processes. To this end, one element of the workshop are open debates on these basic challenges with respect to the overall goal of sustainable development. The RSA Research Network intends to depart from the traditional conference design whereby presentations are accompanied by a few questions or comments. Instead the aim is to set up an interactive framework of intensive scientific discourse within a workshop atmosphere. The conference seeks to be as inclusive as possible, and therefore explicitly encourages the participation of practitioners.

We hope that this topic has a broad appeal and look forward to proposals of interesting papers that will foster lively and enjoyable workshop discussions. Please note the following timeline.

Timeline

15 th April	Researchers and practitioners who would like to present their relevant research and experiences at the conference should send an extended abstract of around 500-800 words to the e-mail addresses shown below no later than 15th April 2014. At the conference there will be full paper sessions chaired by a discussant as well as poster presentations and accompanying discussions.
5 th May	By this date contributors will be informed whether their paper / poster has been accepted.
15 th June	Deadline for notified presenters to register for the conference. This also applies to those who would like to participate without presenting a paper or exhibiting a poster.
10-11 th July	Conference dates

Location and Organization

The workshop is hosted by the University of St. Gallen. There is **no** participation or **registration fee**, **but registration is required for participation**. For further information, expression of interest and submission of abstracts, please contact **both**

- Manfred Walser, Institute for Systemic Management and Public Governance IMP-HSG, University of St. Gallen (CH); local organiser, E-Mail: manfred.walser@unisg.ch
- Dr. Gerd Lintz, Leibniz Institute of Ecological Urban and Regional Development, Dresden, Germany; network management, E-Mail: G.Lintz@ioer.de

Further information on the RSA Research Network may also be found under <http://www.regionalstudies.org/research>.

Travel and Accommodation Bursaries

Thanks to the support of the Regional Studies Association, we are able to offer **one travel bursary of £300** to assist an eligible attendee with his/her travel and accommodation costs. The bursary is redeemable on presentation of receipts for appropriate expenses (to the specified limit). Those eligible to receive the bursary are any student member of the RSA, any early career member of RSA, any associate (retired) member of RSA, and any member working in a Band B, C or D country. Those wishing to apply for the bursary should include an additional paragraph in their abstract submission to the workshop organisers indicating their eligibility and wish to apply. The closing date for bursary applications is also **15th April 2014**.

Background: The research network

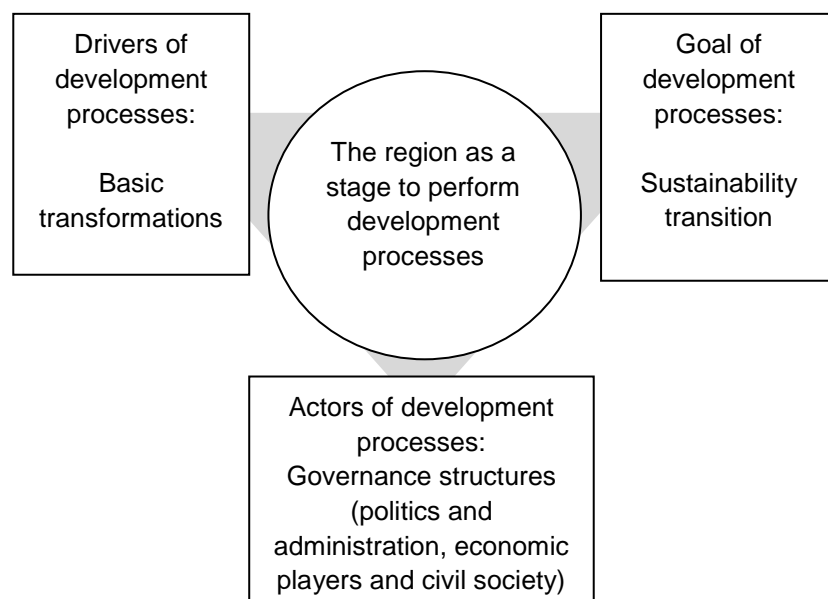
The RSA Research Network on 'Governing the Sustainability Transition – Defining Challenges and Opportunities for the Regional Scale' is the result of an earlier RSA Research Network on Environmental Regional Development which hosted a series of three conferences from 2010 to 2012. The scientific discourse during the three conferences led to a cluster of fundamental questions which will shape regional development processes in the future. One starting point is the distinction between the various facets of 'sustainability' as a concept, involving political-economic, social and ecological changes which foster the *Sustainability Transition* of regions. Such transition describes the overall goal of regional sustainable development and its implementation.

Another starting point is the ever more evident megatrends which serve as framework conditions or 'drivers' for regional development. Such *transformation processes* include climate change, the scarcity of resources, the speed and scale of urbanisation, demographic change, global financial crisis, global trade schemes, technological innovation as well as the unbalanced nature of global power. These processes influence one another, and will have a range of impacts at different spatial levels and in different regions. The transformation processes also take place at varying speeds in different contexts, prompting different regional ecological, social and economic urgencies.

Once the basic, autonomous transformations have been identified, it is vital to determine how these processes of transformation are interrelated and what this implies for the desired Sustainability Transition. The analytical focus is on the *regional scale*, while taking into account the relations to other scales. To find appropriate and tailor-made strategies for the management of Sustainability Transition, it would be helpful to know how regions are likely to develop under the influence of transformation processes which are in part resistant to outside influence. There is likely to be a variety of responses from different types of regions with diverse conditions and circumstances, i.e. urban and non-urban, central and peripheral, developed and underdeveloped. This will require the tailor-made, regionally-adapted identification and definition of sustainability goals.

In our view, Sustainability Transition must be understood as a combination of deliberate and interconnected processes of change. Consequently, the management of Sustainability Transition, which is our main interest here, implies changing the way in which society at different spatial scales (here the regions) reacts to and deals with various determinants of sustainability. Whether process, concept and outcome, sustainability embraces essential facets of economic, societal and environmental change. This is precisely the point at which *governance, actors and institutions* come into play as key drivers and facilitators of change. The rationale of the research network can be illustrated as follows:

Overview: Network Rationale



Set of Key Questions

Following this rationale, the research network has formulated a set of key questions:

Conference 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- What kind of transformation processes do we expect to occur and what are the repercussions for different regions?- How can science help to anticipate possible trajectories of future development and to analyse the complex interrelationships between different processes at the regional level?- What is the impact on political agendas? How are these being defined and translated into policies in a multi-actor, multi-sector and multi-level governance setting?
Conference 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- How is sustainability defined and how is the sustainability transition currently managed?- What are the limits and challenges posed by current management and governance practices?- And how can we better manage the process in interplay between government and governance processes?
Conference 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- What is the impact on regions and how do they meet the demand for sustainability transition management?- How can – and do – regional development strategies respond to varying conditions and circumstances, such as between cities, between urban and non-urban areas, and between developed and less developed regions?- And how does this affect potential and already implemented approaches to sustainable development?

Series of Three Workshops

To explore these questions and to find some answers, the RSA Research Network is organizing a series of three conferences:

1. Transition processes and their meaning for the concept of Sustainable Development - Linking local practices and global agendas
2013, 9-10 October, University of Westminster, UK.
2. How to govern fundamental sustainability transition processes?
2014, 10-11 July, University of St. Gallen, CH.
3. What is the role of regions in governing the sustainability transition?
2015, spring, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Chicago/US (pre-AAG 21-25 April).

Core Members of the RSA Network

Prof. David Gibbs, University of Hull (UK); Dr. Tassilo Herrschel, University of Westminster (UK); Dr. Robert Krueger, Worcester Polytechnic Institute (US); Prof. Bernhard Müller and Dr. Gerd Lintz, Leibniz Institute of Ecological Urban and Regional Development (DE); Prof. Christian Schulz, University of Luxembourg (LU); Prof. Alain Thierstein and Dr. Nadia Alaily-Mattar, Munich University of Technology (DE); Manfred Walser and Dr. Roland Scherer, University of St. Gallen (CH).