



Transformations to Sustainability Programme

Virtual workshop: The politics of transformative research Background and agenda

28 May – 5 June 2020

Context of meeting

Under the exceptional circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic, the midterm workshop of the T2S programme in Delft cannot go forward as planned. However, it is important that the T2S projects take the opportunity to meet (virtually) at the beginning of June, not simply as a matter of form, but for two main reasons:

- First, because the COVID-19 pandemic is having an impact on all the projects – interrupting fieldwork, causing the cancellation of meetings, causing financial stresses, etc. We believe it important that the projects re-connect at this critical moment, to recognize what is happening, reflect on what we are learning from this situation, and discuss how we can support each other in dealing with the related challenges.
- Second, because the knowledge being produced by the T2S projects is vitally important to the continuing global effort to achieve sustainability, and will be even more so in the post-crisis rebuilding. We need to continue this work, in a longer-term perspective. Beyond COVID-19, we want to know what is happening in the projects, how you are advancing, what is working well or not so well, what you are concerned or excited about. We need a moment for collective intelligence and creativity, to identify what we can do now, and in the future, to increase the programme's contribution to knowledge, policy and action.

The virtual meeting will allow projects to share and discuss experiences, provisional findings, learning, and anticipated challenges, and identify common needs and opportunities for learning, support, collaboration and communication.

For more information, contact Sarah Moore at transformations@council.science.

Meeting objectives

Most of the original midterm workshop theme and objectives are still valid, but have been and will continue to be adjusted to reflect the new virtual format of the meeting and the new context presented by the COVID-19 crisis:

1. **To share knowledge and learn from each other**, focusing on the theoretical, methodological, practical and socio-political findings, issues, needs or challenges which have arisen.
2. **To (self-)assess progress** so far, at project and programme levels and to think strategically about the remaining project and programme duration.
3. **To strengthen connections between the projects** and identify perspectives and themes for cross-project enrichment and programme-level contributions to knowledge, policy and action in 2020 and beyond.

Meeting theme

The original theme of the workshop was 'The politics of transformations to sustainability and engaged research'. Our immediate context may have changed, but the politics and ethics of transdisciplinary research for transformations to sustainability will continue to provide a unifying theme for the virtual meeting.

The projects making up the Transformations to Sustainability programme are all engaging with thorny issues concerning the politics of transformations on at least three levels.

There are the political environments in which the projects were conceived and are now being carried out. Despite the emergence of influential international and national policy frameworks promulgating transformations, political regimes have remained resistant to proposals for radical change; in many places and ways, in both the Global South and North, the political environment has become more difficult for transformations research and action since the inception of the projects some three years ago.

Second, the T2S projects are all grappling with the intertwined politics and ethics of co-production, and the imbalanced power relations at play in multi-stakeholder research processes. Doing co-produced research for sustainability implies engagement with a politics of research funding that brings with it certain enabling or constraining expectations as regards relevance, outcomes and impacts in the world.

Third, the T2S programme itself aims to be political and visionary in its attempt to generate new knowledge, put into practice and promote certain principles that are antithetical to prevailing political and economic paradigms – giving attention to, for example, the contested and political nature of sustainability problems and their framings and to questions of equity and justice in solutions-oriented research.

All projects will be asked to reflect on and address questions such as:

Theoretical

- How is your project transformative? How does it engage with politics in the effort to be transformative? What does 'transformative' research entail, both conceptually and practically, in and for the Global South and North? Does research become 'political' when it tries to be transformative, and how should/can this be managed effectively?
- And in the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic, what role is the global crisis playing in politics and transformation processes? How does this crisis affect the concept of sustainability itself? What are the emerging gaps in our knowledge? Can we begin to ask whether the COVID-19 crisis can offer an opportunity for societal transformation to sustainability? How can transformations to sustainability emerge and endure in context of political turmoil?

Methodological

- What does it mean to do engaged research on social transformations to sustainability in a time of crisis? How can participatory research be carried out in this context? How is your project adjusting to the new conditions, in the short and longer term?

Ethical

- How are we dealing with issues of power, social and gender relations during our research?
- How does COVID-19 affect ongoing processes of co-production?

- How does our research deal with and make visible the most vulnerable social groups who are the most affected by this crisis?
- What does this crisis imply about how we perform research, produce knowledge, teach and assess our work as researchers (or research funders)?

Political/action-oriented

- What do we know or what are we learning that other researchers, science funders, policy actors and practitioners should know, including about how to apply levers of system change and redirect the post-pandemic recovery in sustainable directions?

Dr. Giuseppe Feola will deliver a keynote talk on Thursday 28 May on: ‘The politics of (un)making sustainability transformation beyond capitalism’,

Abstract

Theorizations of sustainability transformation have foregrounded processes of creation (making) of novel socioecological arrangements, but have obscured processes of deliberate deconstruction (unmaking) of existing, unsustainable ones. Yet, with ever more compelling evidence of the unsustainability of capitalist ‘development’, as well as of the lock-in of this economic paradigm, it is problematic to assume transformation can happen by mere *addition* of supposed ‘solutions’, be they technological, social, or cultural. In fact, we need to better understand whether and how the *subtraction* of problematic existing institutions, forms of knowledge, practices, imaginaries, and power and human-non-human relations matter in sustainability transformation in the first place. The aim of this paper is to advance theorizations of sustainability transformation by specifically disentangling processes of construction (making) and deconstruction (unmaking). To do so, the paper uses the case of a concrete, ongoing sustainability transformation, *Territorio Campesino Agroalimentario*: a peasant movement in Colombia that is engaged in the construction of a socio-economic model based on relational ontologies and principles of autonomy, dignity and sufficiency. The paper identifies processes of unmaking of capitalism in *Territorio Campesino Agroalimentario*, discusses their diversity beyond siloed paradigms or disciplines, and shows how they interplay concretely with the making of post-capitalist realities. In doing so, this paper demonstrates that political strategies for unmaking capitalism and making alternatives in sustainability transformation differ, but can be entangled in productive ways.

Biography

Giuseppe Feola is Associate Professor of Social Change for Sustainability at the Copernicus Institute of Sustainable Development, Utrecht University (the Netherlands). He works on social-ecological change in modern societies with a primary empirical focus on agri-food systems. His research is currently funded by an ERC Starting Grant and a Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research Vidi Grant, and focuses on processes of ‘unmaking’ of capitalism in agri-food social movements. His most recent book is: *Climate and Culture: Multidisciplinary Perspectives on a Warming World* (Cambridge University Press).

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Workshop agenda

Keynote talk, 14h-15h CEST, Thursday 28 May: The politics of (un)making sustainability transformation beyond capitalism
Giuseppe Feola, Associate Professor, Copernicus Institute of Sustainable Development, Utrecht University (see abstract below)

2 June (90 min) 15h00–16h30 CEST	3 June (90 min) 13h00–14h30 CEST	4 June (90 min) 17h00–18h30 CEST	5 June (120 min) 15h00–17h00 CEST
<p>Introduction to the meeting [10'] Sarah & Susi</p> <p>Facilitators: Robert & Margreet</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GOLD MATTERS [12'] Sabine Luning & Eleanor Fisher • WATERPROOFING DATA [12'] João Porto de Albuquerque & Fernanda Lima <p style="text-align: center;">Break (5')</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GoST [12'] Andy Stirling & Sheila Jasanoff • MISTY [12'] Neil Adger & Caroline Zickgraf 	<p>Welcome to the session (5')</p> <p>Facilitators: Fabio & Anjula</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TAPESTRY [12'] Synne Movik & Shilpi Srivastava • IPACST [12'] Elisabeth Eppinger <p style="text-align: center;">Break (5')</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SecTenSusPeace [12'] Mathijs van Leeuwen & Emery Mudinga • H2O-T2S [12'] Sharlene Gomes 	<p>Welcome to the session (5')</p> <p>Sarah – summarizes input received overnight</p> <p>Facilitators: Lyla & Leon</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • T2GS [12'] Margreet Zwarteveen & Seema Kulkarni • CON-VIVA [12'] Rob Fletcher & Kate Massarella <p style="text-align: center;">Break (5')</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TRUEPATH [12'] Frederic Huybrechs & Milagros Romero • AGENTS [12'] Eduardo Brondizio 	<p>Welcome to the session (5') Sarah</p> <p>Making connections across projects – flash introductions to break-out group topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theory: Lyla & Susi [5'] • Methodology: Leon & Fabio [5'] • Ethics: Robert [5'] • Politics & action: Anjula [5'] <p>Breakout groups around the four topics [40']</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Break (10')</p> <p>Reports from the break-out groups [30']</p> <p>Final observations, consolidation & agreement on follow-up action (20') Sarah & Susi</p>

Facilitators (in order of appearance) : Sarah Moore, Susi Moser, Robert Pijpers, Margreet Zwarteveen, Fabio de Castro, Anjula Gurtoo, Lyla Mehta, Leon Hermans