

Urban sustainability transitions as spaces for experiential learning

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Focus

- **Urban sustainability transitions:** moving towards a more sustainable society through "learning by doing & doing by learning"
- Importance of experimental and experiential learning
- ≠ self-explanatory ideas: their meaning and educative value have to be explored theoretically and empirically

Aims

- Develop and present a **conceptual and analytical framework** for understanding urban sustainability transition initiatives as spaces for experiential learning
- Connect insights from **sustainability transition studies** and **political theory on new arrangements of governance** with theoretical frameworks developed in **pragmatist educational theory**
- Advance further **theoretical and empirical research** on how new political spaces of urban sustainability transitions can function as educative spaces that can foster **creativity** in view of exploring and developing new future visions and action perspectives for a transition towards a more sustainable society

Urban sustainability transitions

- Sustainability transitions = **transformative changes of socio-technical regimes at the systems level**, including major changes in production, consumption and distribution of wealth and well-being
- Urban initiatives = important to catalyse, intensify and accelerate sustainable transformations
- Urban initiatives and niche projects put pressure on dominant systems because they come up with alternatives

Urban sustainability transitions

- **Strategic niche management (SNM):** the successful development of niches requires: i) the articulation of expectations and visions, ii) the building of social networks, and iii) (second order) learning processes
- **Multi-level perspective (MLP)** on sustainability transitions: beyond niche-internal processes only → "contextual" factors: transitions more often take place when the stability of dominant systems is called into question both by landscape pressures and by internal contradictions of the regimes themselves.
- How can urban sustainability initiatives be analysed and understood as learning practices?

New political spaces: institutional void

- Government → multi-actor & multi-level governance (hybrid and autonomous networks)
- **Institutional void** = a situation that is characterised by a lack of generally accepted rules and norms for appropriate policy making and politics (Hajer)
- Involved actors deliberate to get to favourable solutions for particular problems, new institutional rules, new norms of appropriate behaviour and new conceptions of legitimate political intervention
- **Educative space?** More creative and less prescriptive:
 - Beyond teaching and learning predefined answers
 - Imagining & creating new desirable possibilities for a sustainable future

Initiatives

- Question:
 - What are the outcomes of the initiatives: reproduction/creativity?
- Why these outcomes: looking into the black box?

How to make sense of creativity?

- Learning theories
 - Constructivism: prior experiences
 - Socio-cultural theories: encounters with the social/cultural and the physical world
- The interplay between:
 - Peoples prior experiences (knowledge, values, power relations/governance ...)
 - Encountering new artefacts, settings, people ...

Transactional theory

- Complementary to the interactional perspective (natural science)
- A first person perspective on interplays
- John Dewey

Interaction

- Interaction: the encounter between two independent atoms, that one can measure before and after the encounter
- Measurement – independently of the researcher
- Sequential time and causal relations

Transaction

- All participants gets its meaning in an event, simultaneously and reciprocally
- Transaction as a figure
- In every event: history, now and future
- The psychological, the material and cultural are constitutive of each others: they becomes partners – relationally – to each others in a transaction

Educative moment

- Discourse practice = a hierarchical order of value spheres
- Foreground – background: theory of companion meanings and values
- Bodily, poignant and not intentional experience --- the discourse practice is dismantled
- Possibility to create something new - Educative moment

Analytical methods

- Dramaturgical analyses
- Practical epistemology analyses

Dramaturgical analytical frameworks

Hajer, Nahuis

- Empirical attention for the **design** of transition initiatives → performative perspective: the particular design of a setting in which utterances are made affects 'what is said, what can be said, and what can be said with influence'
- **Scripting**: characters in the play, cues for appropriate behaviour, access conditions
- **Staging**: organisation of an interaction through tools, methodologies, activities, formal and informal rules of the game, etc. (incl. artefacts and physical situation)
- **Performance**: the way in which the contextualised interaction itself produces social realities such as understandings of the issue at stake, knowledge, and new power relations

Practical epistemology analysis (PEA)

Wickman & Östman

- **Encounter**: with other people (e.g. teacher, peers), with the physical world, what is read in a book, experimental material, a statement, etc.
 - **Stand fast**: what people already know in a situation, point of departure for interactions with the world
 - **Gap**: break, visible through hesitation, question...
 - **Relation**: to fill a gap, a person has to create a relation between what already stands fast for him/her and what is new in an encounter
- **Learning & meaning making** = bridging gaps by constituting similarities and differences between the new and unknown and what is already known

Fruitful combination?

- Combining PEA and dramaturgical analysis in order to get a better understanding of urban sustainability transitions as educative spaces
- Can – how can – 'gaps' emerging in institutional voids open up for creativity?
- What kind of encounters and which ways to approach them allow for exploring and developing new, sustainable future visions and action perspectives?
- How do the scripting, staging and performance of urban sustainability transition initiatives affect whether and how gaps are noticed and handled and how participants fill gaps with relations?