

# Transdisciplinarity in Practice: Experiences in the 'FarmPath' project

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# Overview

- The **FarmPath** Project
- Transdisciplinary Research
- Applying transdisciplinary research in **FarmPath**
  - Balance of power and obligations
  - Integrating lay, professional and academic knowledges
  - Documenting, assessing and publishing transdisciplinary research
- Future directions
- The emerging European Commission research context

# The FarmPath project

“Farming Transitions”: Pathways Towards Regional Sustainability of Agriculture in Europe

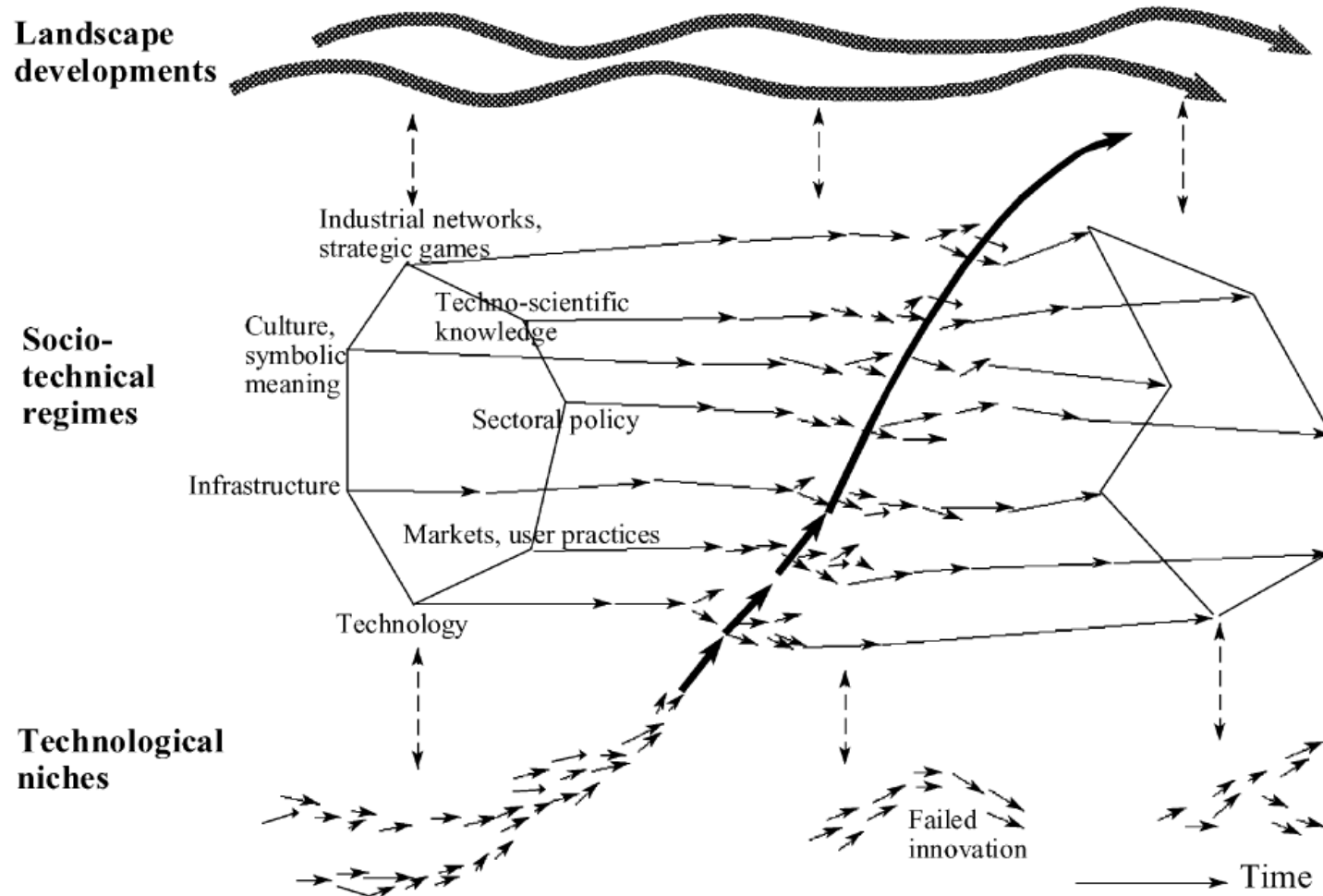
- The overall goal of **FarmPath** is to identify and assess future transition pathways towards regional sustainability of agriculture in Europe, and the social and technological innovation needs required to initiate and progress along these pathways.
- 3 year, €2 000 000 project, 75% funded through the European Commission
- 9 consortium members, led by the James Hutton Institute

# The FarmPath Concept

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- In FarmPath, we propose that increasing **sustainability** of agriculture is best addressed by enabling flexible combinations of farming models, which vary to reflect the specific opportunity sets embedded in **regional** culture, agricultural capability, diversification potential, ecology and historic ownership and governance structures.
- Using **transition management** and **transdisciplinary** research

# FarmPath: emphasis on regime change



(Source: Geels, 2002:1263)

# Key FarmPath Outputs

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- Conceptual framework integrating transition management theory with literature on agrarian change
- study of 18-20 regional sustainability initiatives
- Co-construction of 14 regional sustainability scenarios
- Subfocus on issues affecting young farmers and new entrants
- Production of 'regional sustainability of agriculture handbook' and academic book

# Transdisciplinary Research

- Multiple definitions, four key features:
  - the integration of disciplinary paradigms
  - the use of participatory methods
  - co-production of knowledge with non-academics
  - the application to real-life problems (i.e. not curiosity-driven research).

# From Mode 1 to Mode 2 Science

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## ■ Mode 1:

- Pure: not context-dependent
- Disciplinary: theory-driven, experimental
- Primacy of scientists: expert-led, hierarchical
- Sciences develops, results are transferred

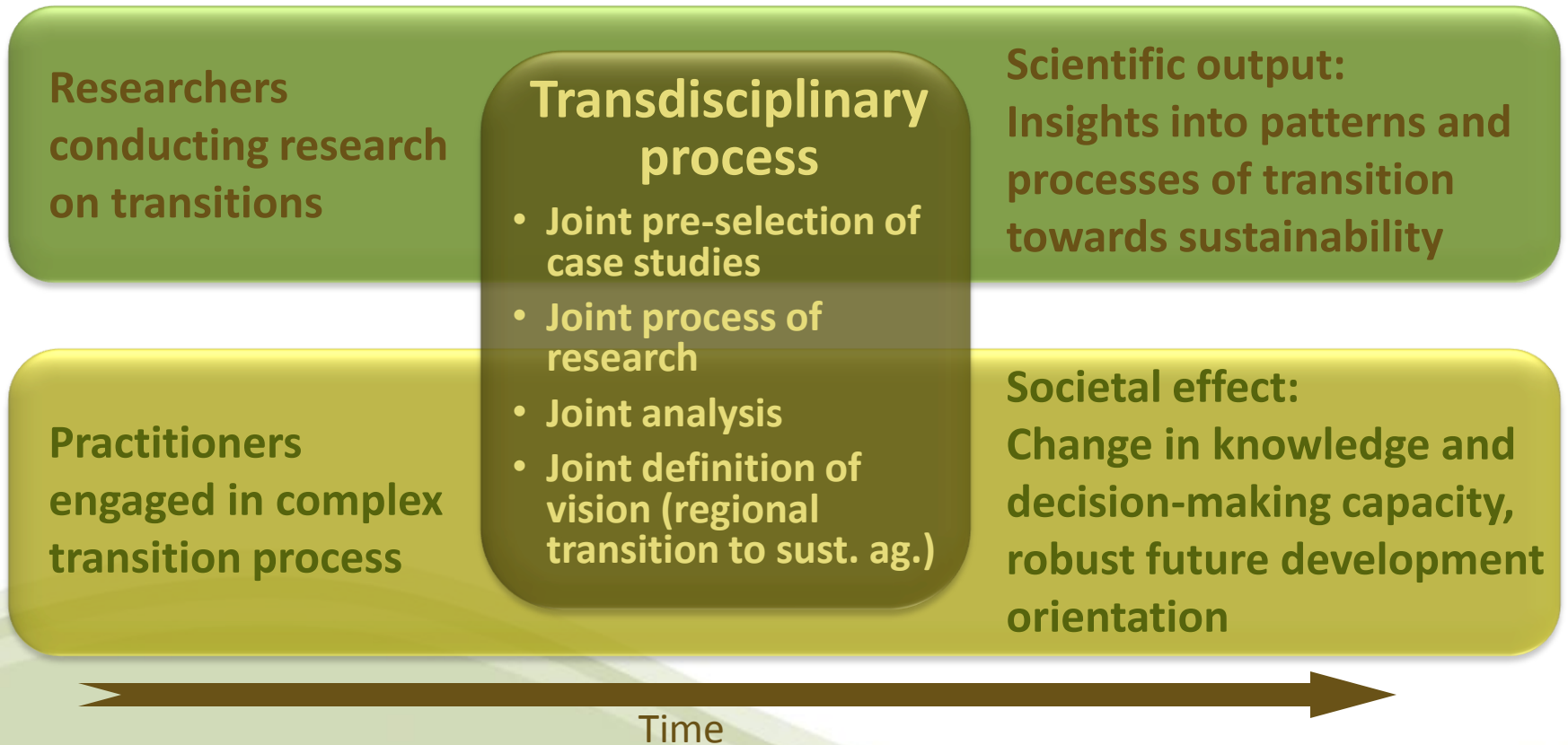
## ■ Mode 2:

- Applied, problem-centered, context-dependent
- Socially-distributed knowledge, dialogic process
- Network-embedded
- Build a learning partnerships

Gibbons et al., 2001



# Transdisciplinary Research in FarmPath



# Transdisciplinary Research in FarmPath

- Key issues to date in **FarmPath**
  - ▶ Balance of power and obligations between academics and stakeholders in formally funded research projects
  - ▶ The practical realities of integrating lay, professional and academic knowledges and discourses
  - ▶ Documenting, assessing and publishing transdisciplinary research

# The balance of power and obligations

- Between researchers and lay participants
  - Project design, reporting, funding
    - ▶ What we've done:
      - ✦ structural increase in 'participation' over the course of the project
      - ✦ Flexible contributions
      - ✦ Enabling research questions of specific interest to stakeholders to be addressed (win/win situation)

# The balance of power and obligations

- For researchers
  - Transdisciplinary research ‘skills’
  - Cultural research practices
  
- ▶ What we’ve done:
  - ✦ Formal training
  - ✦ Option to hire/designate facilitators
  - ✦ Embedding in consortium meetings
  - ✦ Flexible protocols for stakeholder interactions (draft agendas, questions to ask etc)

# Integrating lay, professional and academic knowledges

- First meeting: co-construction or knowledge elicitation?

- ▶ What we did:

- ✦ Participatory process facilitated by an independent facilitator
- ✦ Observation by designated researcher
- ✦ Independent feedback from all participants

- ▶ What we found:

- ✦ Wealth of stakeholder knowledge of regional 'initiatives'
- ✦ Imbalance in participation

# Documenting, Assessing and Publishing Transdisciplinary Research

- Studies not typically found in rural sociology journals
  - Journals: Futures, Ecological Economics, Landscape and Urban Planning
- What is 'quality' transdisciplinary research?
  - Multiple emerging frameworks
  - Conferences

# Future Directions

- Learning to do by doing: ongoing data collection and monitoring of the transdisciplinary research process
  - With the consortium team
  - With the Scottish national stakeholder partnership group
- Future interactions: contested and valued knowledge

# The Emerging EC Research Trajectory

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- Focus on innovation and system change – going beyond niche innovations towards regime change
  - Emphasis on how to support and encourage innovation, and to ensure these innovations spread
- Move towards transdisciplinary – and ‘applied’ research approaches
  - Emphasis on more on-farm research, and co-construction of research to ensure applicability and dissemination of findings
  - Renewed interest in agricultural knowledge and innovation systems – widespread belief that these are inadequate in Europe at present
- Sustainability as environmental, economic and regional



# References

- Geels, Frank. (2002). Technological transitions as evolutionary reconfiguration processes: A multi-level perspective and a case-study. *Research Policy* 31(8-9): 1257-1274.