

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

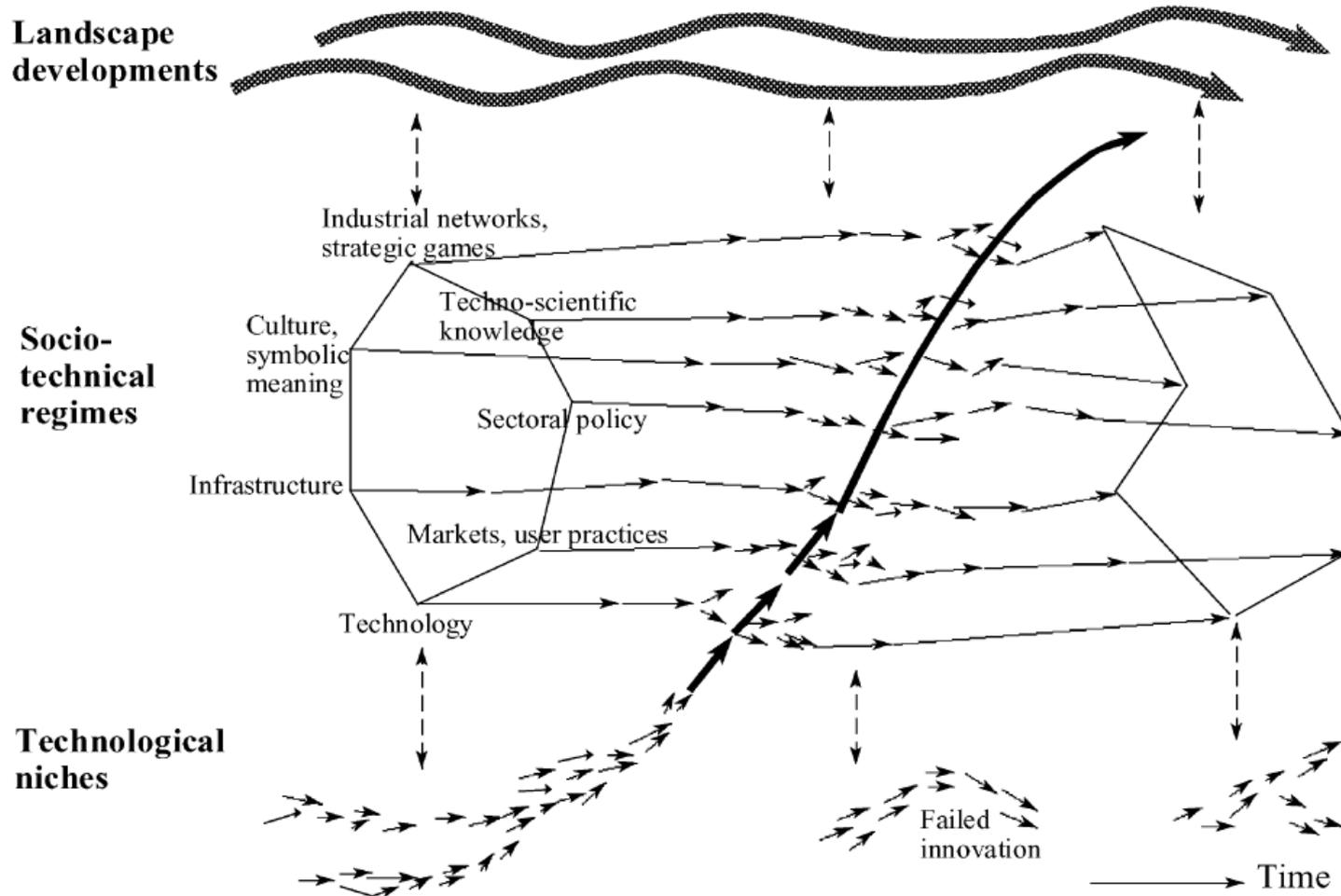
“Farming Transitions”: Pathways Towards Regional Sustainability of Agriculture in Europe

- 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

- 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

- 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

■ Mode 1:

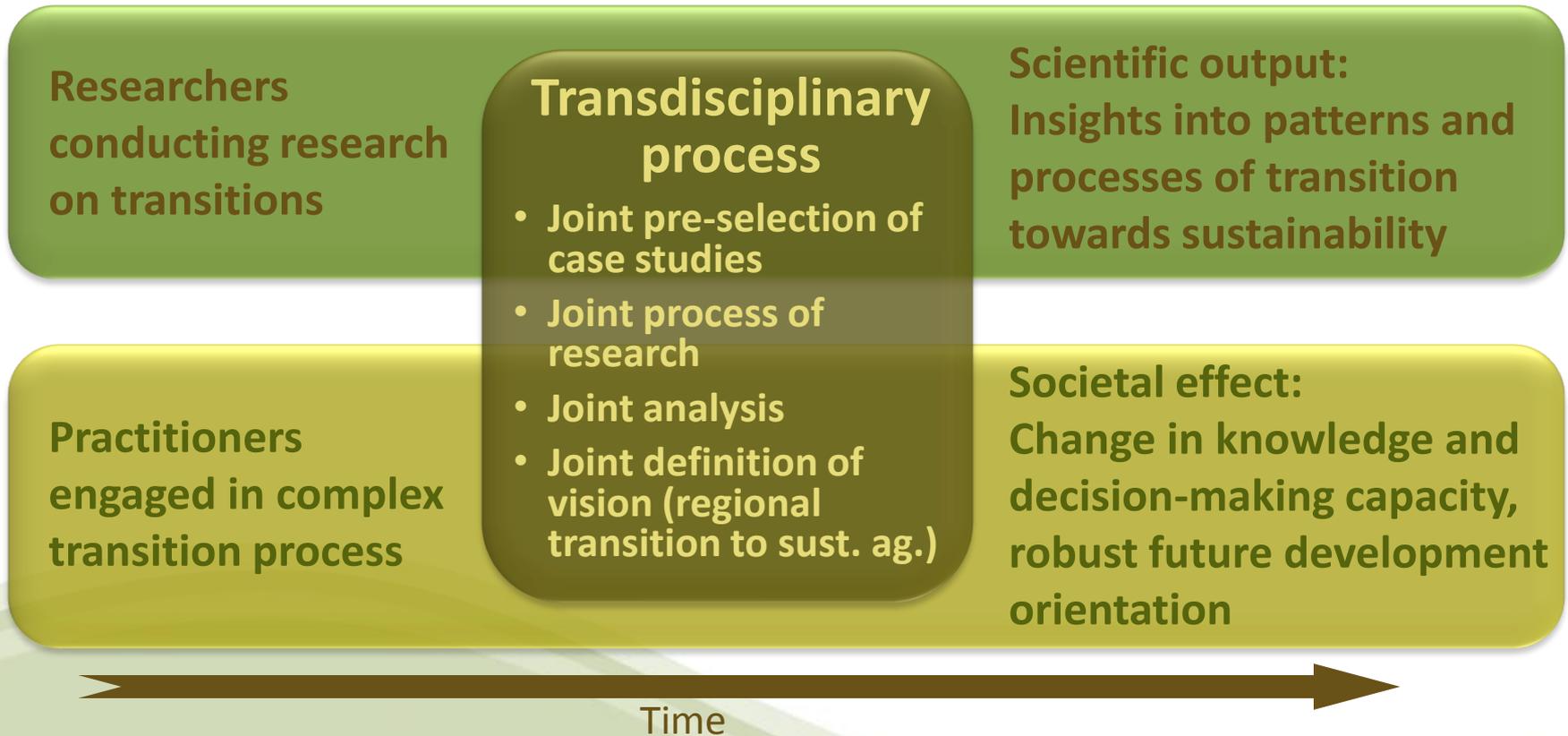
- Pure: not context-dependent
- Disciplinary: theory-driven, experimental
- Primacy of scientists: expert-led, hierarchical
- Sciences develops, results are transferred

■ 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

- 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.