

# Facilitating Learning in View of More Sustainable Agri-food, Mobility, and Energy Practices

Katrien Van Poeck & Leif Östman

European Conference on Educational Research – Glasgow – 25 August 2023

# *Learning* in view of sustainability transitions



The screenshot shows the ScienceDirect website interface. At the top, the ScienceDirect logo is on the left, and navigation links for 'Journals & Books', a search icon, a help icon, 'Register', and 'Sign in' are on the right. Below the header, a large blue banner features the journal title 'Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions' and its CiteScore (11.2) and Impact Factor (9.680). To the left of the title is a small image of the journal cover. Below the banner, a navigation bar includes links for 'Articles & Issues', 'About', 'Publish', and 'Order journal'. The main content area displays the article title 'Learning in sustainability transitions' and its editors: Barbara Van Mierlo, Johannes Halbe, Geeske Scholz, P.J. Beers, and Joanne Vinke-de Kruijf. The last update date is 20 April 2020.

**Lack of conceptual clarity  
&  
weak empirical knowledge base  
for progressing our understanding  
of learning in sustainability  
transitions**

# *Learning* in view of sustainability transitions

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Original Research Paper

Opening up the black box of learning-by-doing in sustainability transitions

Katrien Van Poeck<sup>a,\*</sup>, Leif Östman<sup>b</sup>, Thomas Block<sup>c</sup>

Explorative review of literature  
+ conceptual framework

Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions 39 (2021) 155–172



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Research article

Learning to find a way out of non-sustainable systems

Katrien Van Poeck<sup>a,b,\*</sup>, Leif Östman<sup>b</sup>

WHAT is learned  
+ what is the transition potential

HOW is learning facilitated  
→ guidance for improving  
learning processes

Facilitating Learning in View of  
More Sustainable Agri-food,  
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# Disclaimer...

- Normativity, open-endedness and long-term character of sustainability transitions (STs) (Köhler et al. 2019; Geels 2020)
  - **Impossible** to predict how micro learning practices today will directly and certainly affect long-term, macro societal transitions
- What *is* possible?
  - Identify – in contemporary observable practices – **interventions** that have the potential to **influence**, **accelerate** or **reorient** STs

# Facilitating learning in view of STs

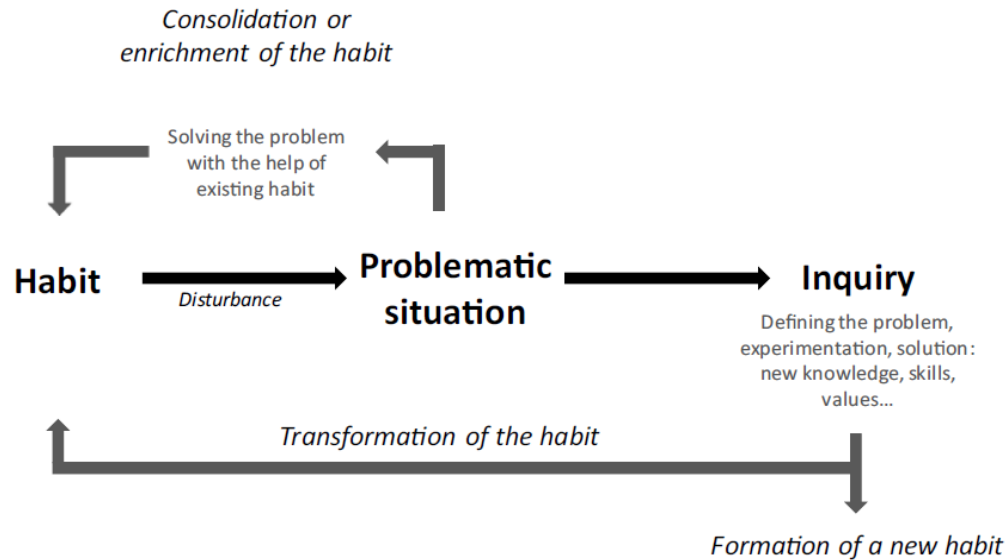
- How can **facilitators' work** help participants to jointly develop pathways towards a more sustainable world?
  - developing mature alternatives for non-sustainable practices
  - overcoming path dependencies
  - ...
- Requires well-considered planning and design in the **preparation** of the learning process as well as careful interventions in the actual **performance**

# Theoretical background

We combine and integrate a dramaturgical, transactional, and didactical approach:

- **Dramaturgical** analysis (Hajer 2005; Yuana et al. 2020): focus on what a setting *does* to a practice – ‘scripting’, ‘staging’ & ‘performance’
- **Transactional** perspective (Dewey and Bentley 1949/1991): capture what settings do with people + what people do with settings simultaneously and reciprocally
- **Didactic** research (Östman et al 2019a,b): gaining insight in what facilitators do and how this affects what the participants learn

# Dramaturgy of facilitating learning processes



‘Learning’ something involves an ability

- to master the **selective attentiveness** (putting relevant objects in the world in focus)
- to fruitfully **act upon the object** in focus to achieve ‘scripted’ goals

→ ‘**privileging**’ (Wertsch 1998): process of inclusion and exclusion that steers learning towards certain outcomes

Facilitating learning = governing the privileging process in connection to a purpose  
→ Develop a specific attentiveness  
→ Engage in a specific activity

# Analytical procedure

- Step 1: **identifying/describing preparatory work** of facilitators in view of scripting and staging a setting (documents, interviews and transcripts of observations)
- Step 2: **investigating learning in action** with the help of Practical Epistemology Analysis ('high resolution analysis' of transcripts of observations)
- Step 3: **revealing the impact of facilitators' actions**: facilitator move analysis



# Variety of interventions in action

= 'Facilitator moves' ('teacher moves')

Adding moves	Directing moves		Deepening moves	
	Confirming	Reorienting	Generating	Judging
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Generalising</li><li>▪ Specifying</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Comparative</li><li>▪ Testing</li></ul>

# A pilot study: learning a way out of non-sustainable agri-food practices

- Workshops: creating scenarios for short food supply chain initiatives (SFSC) – B2B: producers to restaurants, schools, hospitals, retail...
  - Funded by city of Ghent (BE)
  - Variety of participants: farmers, chefs, retailers, civil servants...
  - Development of 3 scenarios: farmers network, knowledge platform, **distribution platform**
  - 1 to be funded as a pilot experiment
- A ***glimpse*** into some findings...





# Excerpt 1: How to encourage more producers and consumers to work with SFSC

## *Situation:*

*Fred, chef in a top-end restaurant, argues – again and again – that it is a matter of emphasising the high quality of products and of being proud to work with them*

*Gaby, a dairy farmer, says that Fred's argument does not hold in the case of milk since the convenience of pre-packaged, sterilised milk is more attractive for customers than higher quality fresh milk with limited shelf life – she faces a **problematic situation***

*Fred continues to repeatedly raise the argument of quality and pride and he takes a lot of space in the discussion*

Selective attentiveness: focus on obstacles and on Gaby's company

– **Facilitator:** And so, apart from that – because you [Fred and Anna] have now indicated that in the catering industry it can grow and that it is more evident there to cook with products coming from the short chain – but are there other **obstacles** for **your** company [Gaby] to fully switch to the short chain? ...

Reorienting move

– **Fred:** [interrupts] If it would become attractive, in fact the purchase would become very constant.



# Excerpt 1: How to encourage more producers and consumers to work with SFSC

- **Facilitator:** Yes, so that's a point you've made, but I wondered if there were any other, well doubts that [Gaby] experiences about switching to the short chain. Or reasons to say we are going to fully commit to it?
- Gaby: I don't know... yes, yes it is not that easy to organise that you know. Because you already have to run a **busy** company so it all adds on. I think, when it is up and running that it is not so... but it is indeed the **start-up phase**...
- **Facilitator:** A period where you have to do a lot of things in parallel?
- Anna: Is it also the logistics, the transportation actually, that is difficult? Or also looking for-
- Gaby: [interrupts] Gosh, all kinds of things. We just started to work with personnel. It is not so easy to just start to do that. Those are all such **things that you know nothing about**.

Reorienting move



# Excerpt 2: How to match the different expectations on the supply and demand side?

## *Situation:*

*Realising that the vegetables that would be delivered to the distribution platform by the farmers would come straight from the field and not be processed, John, a cook in a kitchen of an elderly home who is used to work with convenience food, faces a **problematic situation**: the specificity of the supply does not match his particular needs*

- John: I don't even have the space in my kitchen where I can peel potatoes. I don't have that anymore. I no longer have a space where I can process my vegetables. I did have that 20 years ago.
- Eric: Yes yes yes yes I understand that.
- John: For example, 20 years ago apples were peeled with four people ... Now this would cost [too much] That is no longer possible. That all disappeared right. ...
- Eric: Yes, that is what I mean by stepping back in time. If you only...
- John: But you can't do that anymore, you can't reverse that ... That's not possible.



# Excerpt 2: How to match the different expectations on the supply and demand side?

- William: Not entirely, but there are some opportunities.
- John: There are certainly some opportunities. There are some products that are certainly not a problem. For example salad, chicory and so on. That's not too much work. But it's about those other things.
- **Facilitator: And what opportunities do you see in it? ...**
- William: I know a farmer who says: ... I have an agreement with two hospitals that I deliver to and all my harvest goes there and I have a much better price
- Eric: But is that also processed in the hospital, that entire harvest?
- William: He works with a factory to peel it. ... but I am just saying: that peeling could for example be included in that distribution platform.

Specifying move

Specific activity: specify opportunities

# Conclusions

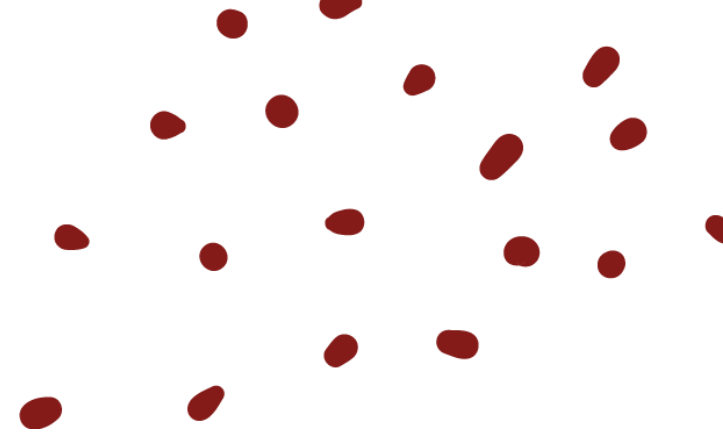
- A **methodology** that allows to investigate the effect of facilitators' work on the outcome of learning processes in view of STs → empirically grounded **knowledge on how to fruitfully facilitate learning** in view of STs (in preparation and performance)
- Crucial for facilitators:
  - Being aware of ongoing privileging and consciously **govern** these
  - **Anticipating** the performance already in the planning
  - Performing well-considered interventions ('**facilitator moves**')
  - Building-in **check-points** to explore participants' response to actions

# Conclusions

- Facilitating learning in view of STs  $\neq$  a matter of effectively changing participants' thinking and acting towards predetermined outcomes
- Nevertheless: it does require careful and well-considered planning and steering in the pursuit of helping the participants to jointly develop promising pathways towards a more sustainable world



# Thank you!



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