

KSI proves itself to be a frontrunner in transition research

'What can you do with ten million euro's, the equivalent of one tenth of a promille of the Dutch natural gas revenues in 2009? Well, you can renovate an old steamship into a magnificent conference centre. You probably need some more money, but you'll come a long way. You can also finance a research programme for transitions to a sustainable society. Ten universities and TNO actually achieved much more than de targets we set at the start of the programme.' With this kick-off Jan Rotmans* proudly opened the final conference of the Knowledge Network for System Innovations and Transitions (KSI) at 3 and 4 june 2010 in Rotterdam.

The results of the research programme that Rotmans presented on the former cruise ship the ss Rotterdam were impressive. Apart from the many peer reviewed articles, PhD theses, scientific books and book chapters, one of the most influential accomplishments of the KSI network appears to be the infusion of the transition language in the discourse of academics and practitioners. Concepts like *niches*, *regime*, *landscape*, *multi-pattern transition pathways*, *multi-level approach*, *transition management*, *strategic niche management*, *transition arenas*, *frontrunners* and *regime players* have become important building blocks in many analysis, policy documents, project proposals, professional discussions and societal debates. A strong illustration of the suitability and usefulness of the analytical framework KSI has created, and which also became apparent in the book written by Diederik van der Hoeven. The first copy was offered by John Grin to Jacqueline Cramer.

*Rotmans is professor at the Erasmus University Rotterdam and one of the directors of KSI, next to prof. Johan Schot (Technical University Eindhoven), prof. John Grin (University of Amsterdam) and mr. drs. Marjan Minnesma (Urgenda). Together they cover the three domains of KSI: Historical research (led by Schot), Current and future transitions (led by Rotmans) and the Governance of transitions (led by Grin). Minnesma was responsible for the management of the KSI programme and also, as director of the action organization Urgenda, for the appliance of the growing academic knowledge into the transition practice in the Netherlands.

Transition management in governmental policy

In her keynote speech Jaqueline Cramer reflected upon her experiences with transition management. As Minister of Spatial Planning and the Environment in the Netherlands she translated her knowledge of transition management research into practice while designing and implementing the national Climate Change Programme. Organizing a transition arena, drafting a transition agenda, visioning transition paths and performing transition experiments in networks were important stepping stones to get the programme implemented in cooperation with all relevant actors from public and private sectors. The objectives are ambitious: 20% renewable energy, 20% energy saving and 30% CO₂-reduction in 2020. Large budgets for innovation were provided to realize specific targets for sectors like Transport, Energy, Agriculture and Housing.

The programme has produced some successes, especially in those sectors where explicit attention was paid to learning in networks. But there were also some setbacks to overcome, amongst other things because powerful sector organizations are inclined to defend laggards in stead of frontrunners. Cramer identified three success factors for transition management: 1) consistent government policy, 2) steering industry in such a way that niches of sustainable innovations can become mainstream and 3) understanding ways to strengthen the societal movement toward sustainable energy. She concluded her speech with the observation that the Netherlands is entering the acceleration phase in transition management and called on to the present scientists to provide more and deepened insights into the ways in which innovation systems can evolve and governance should be provided.

Back to the future

This call was well received by the various speakers at the conference: many academics are very eager to elaborate the body of science of transitions and system innovations which is not yet complete.

There were some lively, learnsome sessions where PhD candidates presented some of their findings as well as themes for future work. Johan Schot* mentioned plans to rewrite historical transitions in Europe with a focus on transnational flows and networks. Guest speaker and honorary research fellow at the Stockholm Resilience Centre, Brian Walker from Australia pleaded to join the forces of the transition research (DRIFT – KSI) and the resilience research (united in the Resilience Alliance) in the research platoon in the race for sustainability. John Grin* likes to deepen the insights in the diverse interactions between transition dynamics and political dynamics. And Jan Rotmans* is very eager to intertwine transition pattern analysis and governance strategy with a view to boost sustainable transitions into higher accelerations.

The conference made it clear that there is still a lot of learning by doing and doing by learning to do. An important challenge, not just because of the urgency to learn more about sustainable transitions in times of multiple crises, but also because it has proven to be a very fruitful exercise. To conclude: there are many valid reasons to spend another tenth of a promille of the yearly Dutch natural gas revenues. Or let's do something crazy: make it two.

Marc Buitter