

Transgovernance

Advancing Sustainability Governance

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Foreword

Klaus Töpfer

We live, as we always have, in turbulent times. Social systems are reflexive in nature and can and will change pathways step by step, be it over time or instantly and abruptly. These changes may occur because of learning processes in a society or in the political culture or may result from changing power structures. These processes may be smooth and incremental or disruptive and powerful.

Two main changes have altered this already challenging social fabric of the twentieth century. First, we live in the era of the anthropocene (Paul Crutzen). This means: Humankind has become a quasi-planetary force, as the first symposium of Nobel laureates organised in Potsdam, Germany, stated in its declaration in 2007. This immensely productive first symposium has also provided the seed for the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS).

Second, changes at a planetary level take place increasingly often, ever faster than before and with increasing amplitude. Indeed, it is becoming more difficult to differentiate between changes and disasters caused by natural forces and man-made catastrophes, as the reasons are overlapping. The terminology of a ‘great acceleration’ is no longer reserved for special moments in human history. This situation seems to be a companion of our times.

The main question we are confronted with is as follows: Will we be able to respond to these challenges effectively? Even more fundamentally: Are we able to understand the driving forces, and are we in a situation to reduce the complexity of these planetary interdependencies as a precondition for concrete and targeted policy making? Do we make sense of what we witness in the reality of life or is it just happening to us? Will it be possible to transform the wealth of knowledge available into actions and will we be able to take full advantage of the breath of engaged citizens? Do we have to complement the acceleration of changes we are facing nowadays with an acceleration of ideas and solutions as well as ever larger systematic and holistic changes? Or do we have the chance to reduce the complexity of change in order to realise a piecemeal engineering procedure with the chance to react to new insights and knowledge and to new or changing values in an open democratic society?

At the same time: What can we learn from the puzzling fact that some twenty years of sustainability governance – the overarching frame for our considerations – have not led us very far, to say it politely? Should we consider slowing down our actions and reactions and taking time to reflect in order to move forward more effectively? Are we aware of the recommendation formulated by the Spanish philosopher Balthasar Gracian in the sixteenth century: *‘The most difficult part in running is to stand still’*. Are we running too fast whilst not sufficiently questioning the direction in which we are running?

The foundation of the IASS and its cluster ‘Global Contract for Sustainability’ exists to address questions like these. As a consequence, the TransGov project was started in the summer of 2010 as the first fully fledged research project of IASS. Its aim is ambitious and manifold: First, to bring together new and existing ideas on governance for sustainable development and to develop new, that is, ‘advanced’ insights from them. Second, to provide a platform for exchange for scientists, including four research fellows forming the forerunners at the IASS literally, and practitioners. Third, in addressing ‘Science for Sustainable Transformations: Towards Effective Governance’, TransGov has laid out a conceptional matrix for further projects at the IASS in order to find effective ways for science-society collaborations. This book presents the work done by the TransGov project team. It complements the project synthesis report, written by Roeland in ’t Veld, which was launched in November 2011.

We are facing enormous environmental, social and economic challenges as well as opportunities at all levels. These are often not identified early enough, not analysed deeply enough or not systematically integrated into actions. The problems are interconnected, but the levels at which solutions may occur are also linked. People in modern societies are increasingly concerned that they are living in a *‘Nebenfolgesellschaft’*. The fact that science and technology are constantly cultivating deeper insights into the construction patterns of nature and life means that there are far-reaching consequences both in time and space which are not adequately considered. For instance, there is a suspicion that the economic increase measured via the GNP is mainly due to overcoming the previous negative consequences of the growth.

In the year of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro in 2012, it remains essential to address a huge implementation gap with regard to agreed-upon goals and targets. One approach is to define a new set of goals and targets, which fit the purpose and are better than those implemented 20 years ago. These considerations lead to the proposal to work out in Rio+20 additional Millennium Sustainable Development Goals (MSDGs), correcting the failure to concentrate at the UN Millennium Assembly on millennium goals more or less globalising the ‘Western way of development’ to the developing countries as well. The integration of the sustainable component in the MSDGs would put forward rights and obligations both for developed and developing countries to a culturally diversified ‘development’.

Another way of addressing the gap between knowledge and action, or between words on paper – constituting numerous declarations and Calls for Action – and

practice, is to define new approaches such as green economy or, even more important and challenging, a green society. The challenge is to design new institutional arrangements for governing sustainable development, changing technology and behaviour, and asking for efficiency as intensively as for sufficiency. These are just two of the areas which this book addresses through its individual chapters.

One of the main building blocks of the TransGov project has been the concept of 'knowledge democracy' (in 't Veld 2010), which addresses these changes and new dimensions, providing, for example, a better understanding as to why different traditional ways of developing solutions are frequently not suited to the problem for which they were created. Complementing this with Ulrich Beck's approach regarding Second Modernity reveals that classic institutions and approaches will not just disappear but will coexist with new forms. How to handle such transformation processes within the conditions of open democratic societies concerns me a great deal.

Sense-making mechanisms and chains in economy and in modern technologies as well as scientific findings are increasingly global in nature. At the same time – and this is something I have been following for years from a distance and from 'within' – a renaissance of 'culture' or 'traditions' can be observed. As a consequence, rigidity in thinking and acting, for example favouring one-dimensional concepts instead of accepting if not appreciating diversity, will certainly not succeed in bringing us closer to sustainable societies. This is one of the main messages this book explores from different angles.

We must change course significantly and transform practices across different sectors of society, as clearly stated by the 2011 report of the German Advisory Council on Global Change (WBGU). With this said, the question still remains: How do we think and initiate such transformations? TransGov makes the case that many transformation processes will have to occur, more often than not, simultaneously, partially overlapping, at different places at the same time and exercised by people who are multiply engaged in different forums, roles and levels. It also helps us to understand why 'intraventions' in many cases work better than interventions. Hence, 'the global' does not take centre stage at TransGov in order to tackle large-scale problems successfully. For example, the emergence of new and powerful citizens' initiatives comes to mind. The 'Stuttgart 21' case in Germany kept us busy thinking throughout the implementation of the project. Participation of the general public, as integrated in modern regional planning and building legislation, is no longer able to stabilise the peace-making function of legally based processes. Processes leading to a transformation of the German energy system, the so-called '*Energiewende*', after Japan's nuclear disaster of Fukushima at the beginning of 2011, are another case in point. This has resulted in a call for a '*Gemeinschaftswerk*', a common effort. In times of knowledge democracies, it is less of an issue whether or not citizens are allowed to participate and to raise concerns. Their active engagement, namely intraventions, in domains until now covered by governmental actors becomes a necessary condition for effective governance towards sustainable development.

If co-evolution of science and practice is meant to be not just another fancy term which refers to thinking about the science-practice interface, is it the only way to

put forth successfully knowledge-based solutions towards sustainability? Answering this question positively is an easy task. To transform science and practice accordingly – that is, production of useful knowledge here and knowledge-based decision-making there – is not easy at all. However, since providing a platform or interface for science and societal interaction is the mission of the IASS, it was a logical consequence to put TransGov first, in order to reflect on such challenges in more conceptional terms in the first place.

Finally, TransGov is without any doubt the beginning rather than the end of our work on governance for sustainable development. Follow-on activities on governance research at IASS are implemented by focussing on concrete issues. For example, IASS is expanding its work on soils – almost a ‘forgotten’ resource despite its paramount importance – and will set up a knowledge-based monitoring process for the ‘*Energiewende*’. Insights from TransGov will help to design these research activities, inform knowledge exchange platforms therein and put forward recommendations concerning the ‘how to’ of these challenges. The cultural dimension will continue to play a major role in our work. In doing so, culture and governance will alter their roles as ‘dependent’ and ‘independent’ variables, respectively, if one wishes to phrase it this way. Topics such as short-lived climate forcers present straightforward governance challenges if one addresses their drivers and possible response options. In addition, it goes without saying that any critical assessment of climate engineering has at its core a governance challenge as well.

Sustainable development as decided upon at the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 is more than an ecological concept. At this very time, we are confronted with a financial architecture which is far from sustainable and which is even threatening to destroy the sustainable fundament for social stability and environmental responsibility. The massive financial turbulences we are witnessing are irrefutable evidence of the fact that modern societies are living under the dictatorship of short-termism, externalising social and environmental costs due to the prices we are currently paying for goods and services. The financial disaster is nothing less than the oath of disclosure of this short-termism. It is, therefore, a must that we also think ‘out of the box’ with regard to reshaping the financial architecture in a way which ensures it meets the conditions for sustainability. Finally, theories of sustainable development, historical analysis and regional comparisons and reflections on transdisciplinarity more generally will continue as cross-cutting themes of the IASS and its clusters. TransGov and its findings will help shaping these research agendas. Hence, I hope that the IASS with this research project is able to present a modest but at the same time bold contribution to the discussion on how to improve governance for sustainable development – for the planet as well as for people and their places.

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