Webinar Session #4 -- Panel Discussion

WHAT IS NEXT FOR GEOST?
Structure and goals of the panel discussion

- Panelists
  - Christian Binz, Eawag Switzerland
  - Jim Murphy, Clark University, US (MA)
  - Koen Frenken, Utrecht University, the Netherlands
  - Simone Strambach, Philipps University, Marburg, Germany
  - Lars Coenen, Mohn Center, Bergen, Norway

- Core questions
  1. Original contribution: Where do you see the ultimate value added of developing an elaborate GeoST perspective? Which are the literatures/disciplinary research fields/ontologies that have to be leveraged/bridged in order to realize these promises?
  2. Core conceptual tasks: How can we better account for the heterogeneity, and fragmentation of sociotechnical regimes and transition dynamics, as well as the global interdependencies between these processes? And how should we understand “sustainability” and “development” in a GeoST perspective?
  3. Where we are and what’s to do: How well has the GeoST field developed so far and what are the most urgent and promising developments that we should embark on?
GeoST – Contributions, Concepts, and Progress/Future Directions  (Christian Binz)

- **Contributions**
  - Understanding where deep leverage points for transformative change lie in today’s interconnected world
  - Truly multi-scalar approach, beyond a myopic focus on single cities, regions or countries needed, which distinguishes between the multi-scalar configurations of different sectors (e.g. Binz and Truffer, 2017)
  - Creatively combining conceptual ideas from transition studies, human/economic geography, organization studies and globalization literature

- **Concepts**
  - Unpacking the relation between (potentially global) sector structures and (local/regional) institutional arrangements
  - Moving beyond simple niche-regime dichotomies toward competing socio-technical configurations and field logics in transforming sectors
  - Creating a broader understanding of development, beyond ‘green’ innovation in high-tech sectors. Interaction with other literatures in sustainability science needed (i.e. interface of social-ecological and socio-technical systems, resilience vs. transformation, etc.)

- **Progress/Future Directions**
  - An emergent, heterogeneous field of research, which could become a key line of research in innovation studies
  - Develop boundary objects, i.e. mobilizing research questions, conceptual approaches, emblematic empirical cases or new methods
  - Continuous community building, identification of key streams of theorizing & strategic cross-fertilization across academic siloes
GeoST – Contributions, Concepts, and Progress/Future Directions  (Jim Murphy)

• Contributions
  • A GeoST perspective can enable rigorous/comparative research that examines the geographical unevenness of transitions and unpacks the multi-scalar and place/region-specific factors and processes that shape differential outcomes.
  • Productive engagements needed/possible with development studies, comparative urbanisms, variegated capitalisms, and marketization research

• Concepts
  • Moving beyond monolithic, uniform sociotechnical regimes – conceptual work needed to better capture, analyze, and compare the multi-scalarities and internal differentiations, fragmentation, and mis/nonalignments associated with regimes – e.g., see van Welie et al., 2018.
  • Grounded research – build more concepts and theories through the study of everyday practices of providers, users, etc.
  • Better link sectoral regimes and transitions to wider political-economic and socio-economic processes/features.
  • What are development and sustainability? Should they be understood as the same everywhere? Is economic growth compatible with, or necessary for, transitions? How can we link transition dynamics to such outcomes, and how should we measure these (e.g., the SDGs)?

• Progress/Future Directions
  • Healthy/Open/Inclusive/Expanding – Bridges built to STRN and, in particular, evolutionary economic geography and regional studies – need to build on these links and to diversify on all fronts.
  • Bridges in progress – human geography more generally (esp. urban geography and infrastructure studies); development studies but more work in the Global South (esp. cities) needed.
  • Bridges too far? Political ecology – Skeptical, wary of “techno-determinist accounts”; Marxian political economy (especially in its orthodox variations) – GeoST decenters Capital and capitalist imperatives too much.
• Contributions
  • Bridging: Has made the field of sustainability transitions aware that ‘geography matters’ but also introduced geographers to the field of transitions
  • Enriching: On a personal note: GeoST has enriched the evolutionary economic geography focused on supply-side by highlighting role of users and institutions in transitions (Boschma-Coenen-Frenken-Truffer, 2017, Regional Studies)

• Concepts
  • Niches, regimes, landscapes are all spatially differentiated leading to unique local configurations and windows of opportunity
  • Zooming in on a single region can highlight the nexus between socio-technical systems, which is too long ignored in sustainability transitions research

• Progress/Future Directions
  • What does GeoST bring to the policy table?
  • GeoST perspective as a platform
    • connecting economic geography, institutional sociology, development studies and sustainability transitions research;
    • improving theorizing (e.g., evolutionary and institutional theory) + empirics (e.g., away from northern-eurocentric bias)
    • and, perhaps, going beyond sustainability transitions (which is often defined only implicitly as such anyway) and look at societal transitions more generally. This would allow us to learn much more from past work from sociologists, economists, political scientists, geographers and historians. Towards a Geography of Transitions research program?
GeoST – Contributions, Concepts, and Progress/Future Directions  (Simone Strambach)

• Contribution/value added
  • Awareness of the multiplicity of transition paths, their multi-scalarity and spatial shaping
  • Combining conceptual insights from (inter)-disciplinary fields to deeper understand the mechanisms underlying the spatial shaping (Human/economic/innovation geography) & (neo-institutional theory, global & development studies)

• Conceptual tasks
  • Moving beyond the MLP concept to enhance insights of interconnected institutional dynamics at social and spatial scales
  • Integrating insights from social and sustainability innovation research (focus on both global north/south)
  • Improving theory building (time dimension, process dynamics, process ontologies, agency/structure)
  • Development of methodologies for comparative research

• Progress/Future Directions
  • Creating organizational forms as ‘enablers and drivers’ for theory building and unleashing the potential of the heterogeneous community
  • Building a shared understanding of key research gaps, questions, and perspectives
  • Identifying boundary objects to facilitate transdisciplinary knowledge combination and creation
GeoST – Contributions, Concepts, and Progress/Future Directions  (Lars Coenen)

• **Contribution/value added**
  • Spatial turn vis-à-vis normative turn
  • Topical concern, theoretical engagement and policy commitment

• **Conceptual tasks**
  • Contextualize enabling and constraining conditions & processes in sustainability transitions
  • Beyond one-size-fits-all transition governance
  • Need for greater attention for impacts (local and global) of sustainability transitions, both positive and negative

• **Progress/Future Directions**
  • Just transitions and geographies of discontent *(Rodriguez-Pose, 2018)*
  • Place-based transition policy & multi-level governance
  • Beyond the obvious winners & frontrunners: sustainability transitions in ordinary regions and mundane sectors *(Coenen & Morgan, 2020)*

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