RSA Events – Event Report – Webinars by the RSA Research Network Transformative Knowledge Regions (TRAKR)



RSA Events – Event Report – Exploring Transformative Knowledge in Transition Processes and Capturing and Measuring Transformative Knowledge Capacities by Transformative Knowledge Regions

(TRAKR)

*By Jesper Manniche, Anna Butzin, **Hugues Jeannerat (email)**, Luis Cavalhos, Pauline Lavanchy and Kerstin Meyer.*

About RSA Research Network on Transformative Knowledge Regions (TRAKR)

Research Network summary

This research network explores the conceptual, methodological, empirical, and policy dimensions of the recent shift from knowledge-intensive to "transformative knowledge regions". By doing so, it seeks to renew the understanding of knowledge as an asset in regional development in light of ongoing sustainability transitions. The network brings together scholars of the geography of knowledge and sustainability transitions and established and early career researchers.

Aims and ambitions of the Research Network

In 2000, the European Commission launched the Lisbon Agenda, seeking to make Europe "the most competitive and the most dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world" (European Council 2000). This agenda had a significant impact on regional development strategies, such as smart specialisation (Trippl et al.2020), which focuses on supporting knowledge-intensive sectors, organisations, and activities, such as research and development.

Twenty years after launching the Lisbon Agenda, the EU Green Deal policy (European Commission 2019) requires reconsidering the role of knowledge in regional development and its dynamics of generation and use within and across places from a critical and renewed perspective. While the Lisbon agenda sought to enhance the intensity of knowledge creation and sharing to foster innovation driven by market competition and selection, the current Green Deal policy defines expected directions for innovation that should transform the economy and the society towards more sustainable ways of production, consumption and living. This is the background and starting point of this RSA research network.

Report

EVENTS TITLES:

• Webinar 1: Exploring Transformative Knowledge in Transition Processes
• Webinar 2: Capturing and Measuring Transformative Knowledge Capacities

DATE AND PLACE OF EVENT:

• Webinar 1 Thursday 22nd February 2024 – 11am GMT / 12pm CET
• Webinar 2: Thursday 21st March 2024 – 11am GMT / 12pm CET

ORGANISER(S)' NAME(S):

Anna Butzin, Luis Carvalho, Hugues Jeannerat, Pauline Lavanchy, Jesper Manniche, Kerstin Meyer in collaboration with the RSA City and Regional Sustainability Transitions Webinar Series (CREST)

DETAILS OF YOUR EVENT

Knowledge is undoubtedly a crucial driver of social change in the sustainability transition. However, a fundamental question arises: how can "transformative knowledge" be explored and measured across various regions and scales? This question was central to the Regional Studies Association Research Network on Transformative Knowledge Regions (TRAKR) and was addressed in two webinars focused on methods. In February and March 2025, TRAKR collaborated with the RSA City and Regional Sustainability Transitions Webinar Series (CREST) to host these webinars.

The first webinar highlighted epistemological and methodological issues related

to qualitatively exploring how transformative knowledge and knowledge dynamics develop and become established within different regional contexts. It emphasised the transformative value of engaged qualitative research and the sociotechnical configurations and topologies of knowledge in the context of sustainability transitions.

The second webinar sparked discussions on quantifying the potential transformative knowledge assets of regions and nations and the patterns and structures of transformations over time and space. Approximately 20–30 participants, including speakers and delegates, attended the events, representing around the same number of countries. The RSA webmaster holds exact attendance data.

Three keynote speakers were invited for the first webinar, and two for the second webinar. They were selected according to their current research et methodological expertise.

- **Webinar 1:**
  - Keynote 1: Gesa Pflitsch, University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (BOKU) in Vienna – Visual analysis of complex institutional dynamics in transformative knowledge regions.
  - Keynote 2: Christian Binz, Department of Environmental Social Sciences (ESS) at the Swiss Federal Institute of Aquatic Science & Technology (Eawag) – Tracing transformative knowledge dynamics with socio-technical configuration analysis (STCA).
  - Keynote 3: Flora Cornish, London School of Economics and Political Science – Engaged researchers and transformative knowledge: Methodological principles
- **Webinar 2:**
  - Keynote 1: Sebastian Losacker, Justus-Liebig-University Giessen – Geographical sequence analysis.
  - Keynote 2: Tjaša Bartolj and Nika Murovec, Institute for Economic Research of the University of Ljubljana – Advancing the Measurement of Transformative Knowledge Potential: A Collaborative Approach.

The two webinars provided an important opportunity to take stock of current qualitative and quantitative methods in regional studies. By reviewing existing

methodological tools, the webinars helped clarify how these approaches can be used to observe, describe, and analyse the spatial and temporal transformations of knowledge production, circulation, and application within and across regions. A central theme of discussion was the need to adapt these methods to better investigate knowledge dynamics as both a foundation for and a consequence of social transformations. Participants considered how methodological frameworks could be refined or expanded to address processes unfolding at multiple scales — local, regional, national, and global. This included reflecting on how knowledge practices shape, and are shaped by, broader changes in governance, economic systems, cultural practices, and technological innovation, as well as how these processes can be meaningfully captured and interpreted. Finally, the webinars prompted a critical reflection on the epistemological positioning of researchers in social sciences and regional studies. Discussions emphasised not only the role of scholars as observers of learning dynamics across space but also as active participants in the creation, mediation, and development of knowledge. This dual positioning challenges researchers to consider the implications of their involvement in shaping the very dynamics they study and invites a more reflexive, engaged approach to knowledge production in regional contexts.

The two webinars on methods perfectly complemented the initial workshop held in Gelsenkirchen, which focused on conceptualising transformative knowledge regions. These webinars helped establish the foundation for the upcoming second workshop planned for Bornholm, which will be dedicated to empirical case studies exploring these regions.

About the Author of this Report

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