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# Action research for transformation

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**date / location**

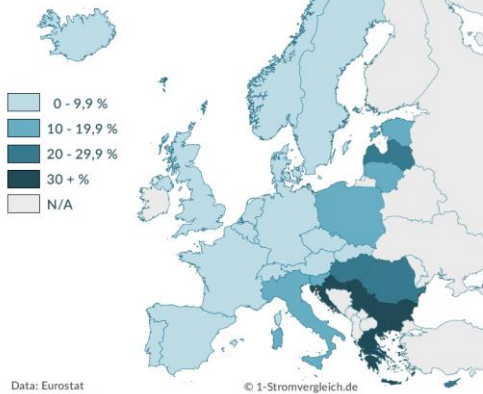
March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Montreal/Online

IICADD Atelier exploratoire sur les coopératives

## ENERGY POVERTY IN EUROPE

Percentage of population in arrears on their utility bills



Data: Eurostat

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“a **persistent problem** is conceptualised as a systemically (re)produced negative side effect of a success factor of that system; i.e., as an enduring problem, in coherence with the pathways and mechanisms by which this problem is produced and reproduced”  
(Schuitmaker 2012: 1022)



Rockström et al. 2009



*Complex | uncertain | difficult to manage |  
hard to grasp | deeply rooted*

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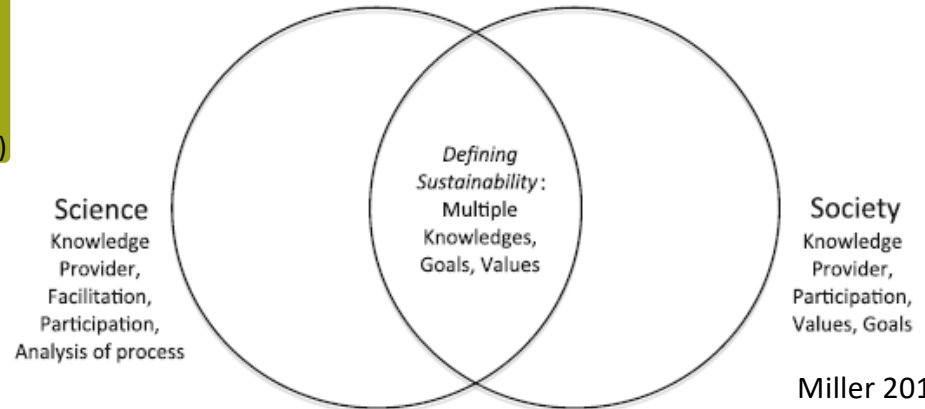
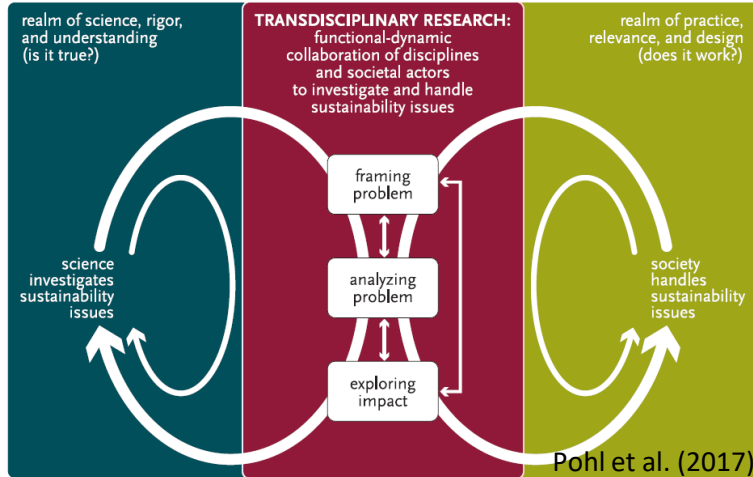
## Such unstructured questions...

... pose a problem to how we generate knowledge about them, they require:

- System perspective: understand interrelations and interdependencies;
- Pluralism: in terms of perspectives (who is a knower) and in terms of methods;
- Collaboration: across disciplines and beyond disciplines;
- Reconstruction: not take a face value, and not stop with deconstruction

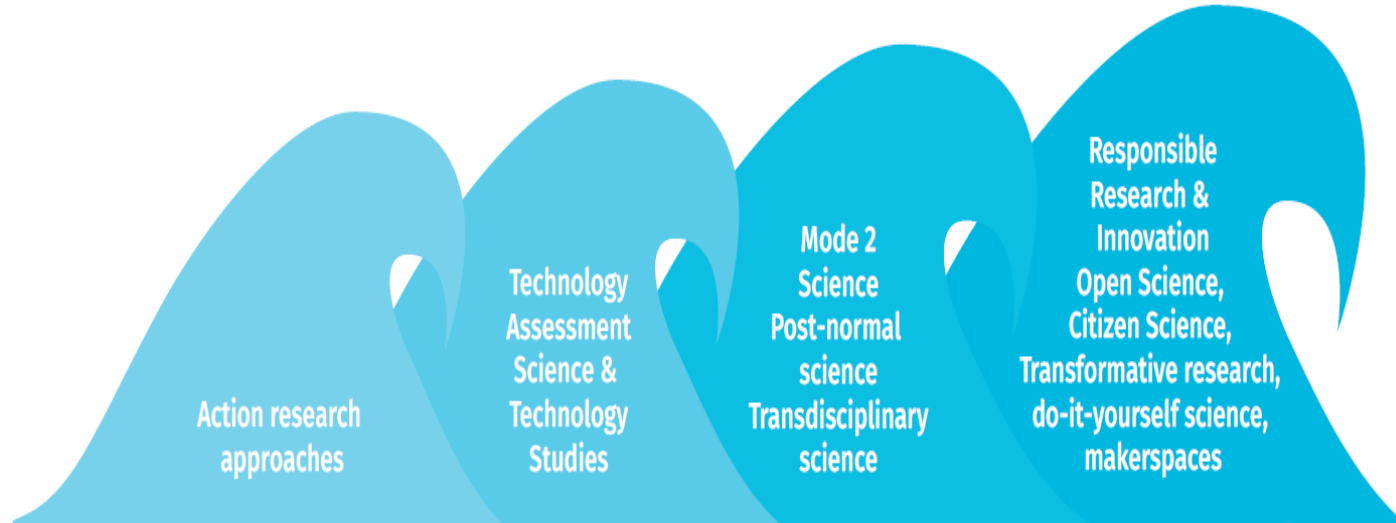
require the production of knowledge that is  
societally relevant, socially robust, or action-oriented/actionable  
(and of transformative action)

# Process-oriented forms of research



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## A long history of process-oriented forms of research



ACTION LEARNING RESEARCH **ACTION RESEARCH** ARTS-BASED RESEARCH ARTS-INFORMED RESEARCH COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY COMMUNITY ACT  
LEARNING COMMUNITY-UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS CO-OPERATIVE INQUIRY CITIZEN SCIENCE CITIZENS' SUMMIT **CITIZENS HEARING** DECOLONIS  
SCHOLARSHIP FEMINIST ACTION RESEARCH FOCUS GROUPS INDIGENOUS METHODOLOGY KNOWLEDGE DEMOCRACY KNOWLEDGE MOBILISATION KN  
DEVELOPMENT PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH PARTICIPATORY RURAL APPRAISAL SCHOLARSHIP OF ENGAGEMENT **SCIENC**  
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CITIZENS' SUMMIT CITIZENS HEARING DECOLONISING METHODOLOGY **DESIGN SCIENCE METHOD** DELPHI METHOD EMANCIPATORY DISABILITY RES  
DEMOCRACY KNOWLEDGE MOBILISATION KNOWLEDGE TRANSLATION ORGANISATIONAL ACTION RESEARCH PARTICIPANT ACTION RESEARCH (PAR)  
APPRAISAL SCHOLARSHIP OF ENGAGEMENT SCIENCE SHOPS USER COMMITTEE WORLD CAFE ACTION LEARNING RESEARCH **ACTION RESEARCH**  
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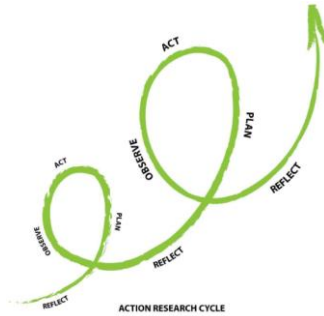
# ENGAGED RESEARCH

**SOCIETY & HIGHER EDUCATION**

Addressing Grand Societal Challenges Together



# Action research?



**Striving for:**  
enhancement of human flourishing, emancipation,  
democracy and the empowerment of those involved  
(Greenwood and Levin 2007, Reason and Bradbury 2008).

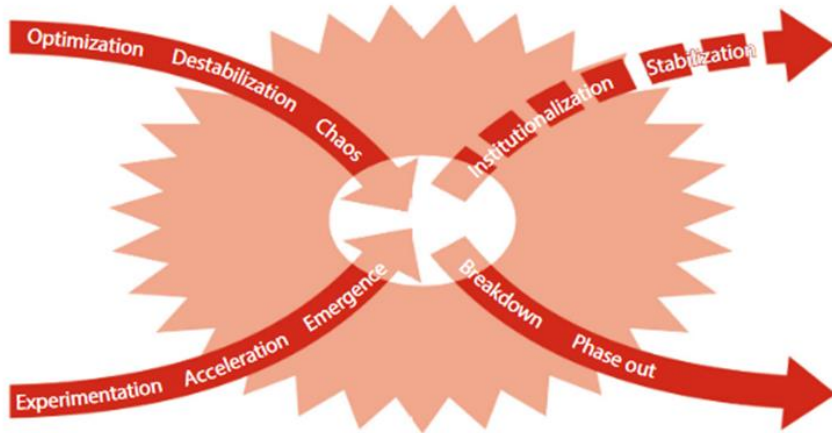


Action research seeks **transformative change** through the simultaneous process of taking **action** and doing **research** which are linked together by **critical reflection**.  
*(AR podcast, episode 1)*

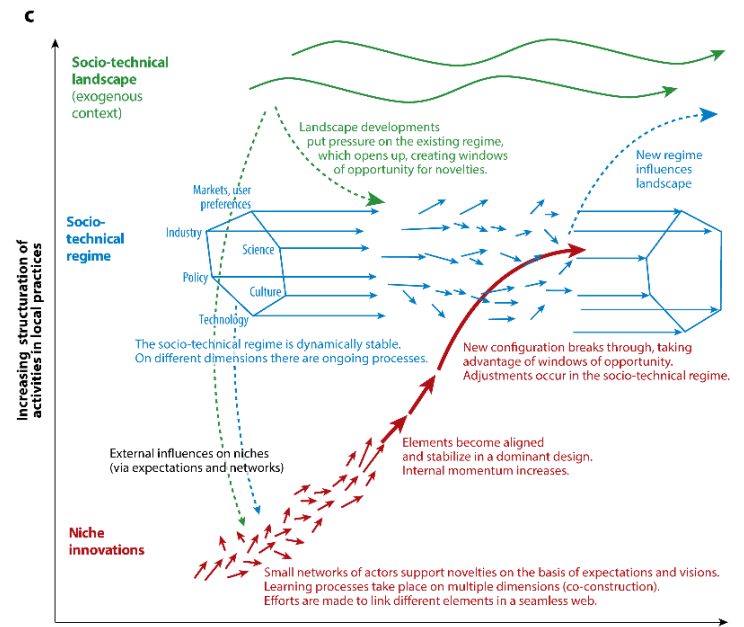
“critical and relational **processes** through which researchers and their co-inquirers aim to **collaboratively** produce scientifically and socially relevant **knowledge** and transformative **action**”  
*(Bartels & Wittmayer, 2018, p4).*



# ... in the context of transformation

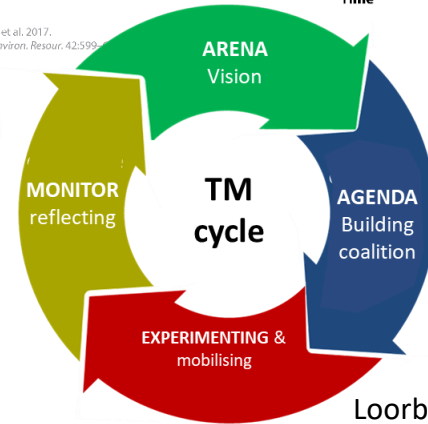


Loorbach et al. 2017



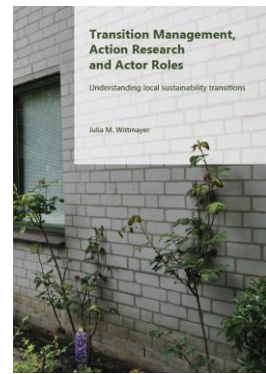
Cf. Geels 2004

Loorbach D, et al. 2017. *Annu. Rev. Environ. Resour.* 42:590



Loorbach 2010

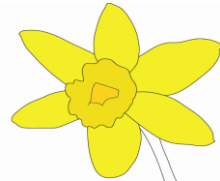




# Action research in Rotterdam-Carnisse (NL)

09/2010 – 06/2015 (different stages)

- What makes for a sustainable neighbourhood – ecologically and socially?
- 'Disadvantaged neighbourhood', financial-economic crisis 2008/09
- Using an action research approach to transition governance



Bloeiend  
Carnisse



# Action-oriented research: Local transition processes

Figure 1: Timeline of the transition management process in Carnisse

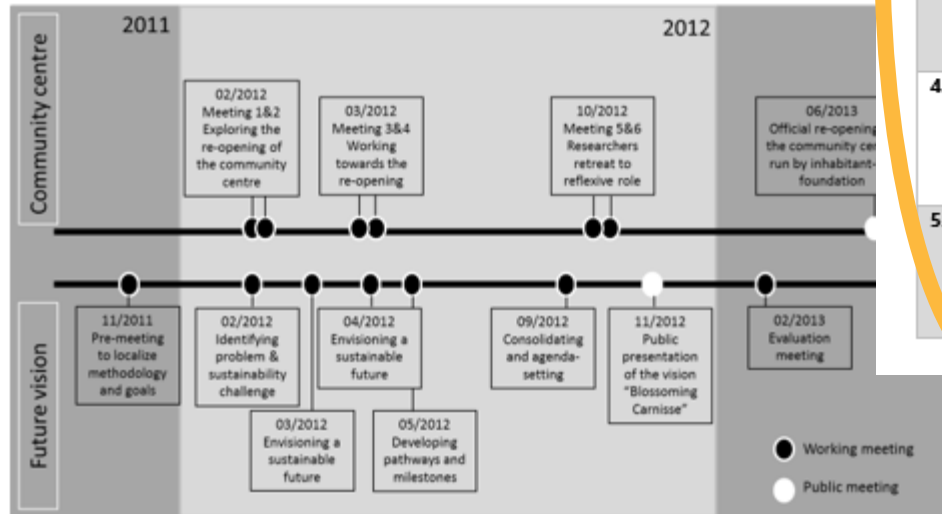
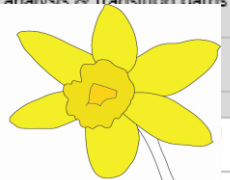


Table 5.5: Phases of the community arena (Source: Wittmayer et al. 2011a: 29-30; \* meeting)

	Key activities	Key output
0. Pre-preparation	A. Case orientation	A. Initial case description for each pilot
	B. Transition team formation	B. Transition team
1. Preparation & Exploration	A. Process design	A. Community Arena process plan
	B. System analysis	B. Insightful overview of major issues/tensions to focus on
	C. Actor analysis (long-list and short-list of relevant actors) incl. interviews	C. Actor identification and categorisation + insight inner context
	D. Set up Monitoring framework	D. Monitoring framework
2. Problem structuring & Envisioning	A. Community arena formation	A. Frontrunner network
	B. Participatory problem structuring*	B. Individual and shared problem perceptions & change topics
	C. Selection of key priorities	C. Guiding sustainability principles
	D. Participatory vision building*	D. Individual and shared visions
3. Backcasting, Pathways & Agenda Building	A. Participatory backcasting* & definition of transition paths	A. Backcasting analysis & transition paths
	B. Formulation agenda and specific activities*	B. Transition possibilities
	C. Monitoring interviews	C. Learning
4. Experimenting & Implementing	A. Dissemination of visions, pathways and agenda	A. Broad involvement
	B. Coalition forming & broadening network	
	C. Conducting experiments	
5. Monitoring & Evaluation	A. Participatory evaluation of method content and process*	
	B. Monitoring interviews	



**Bloeiend  
Carnisse**



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## Choices & Challenges 1

With whom to work?

- Local government, local residents (and are these 'black boxes'?)

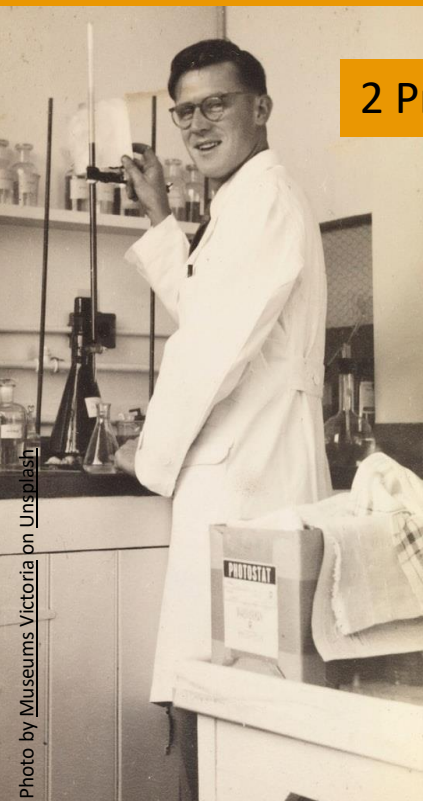
But also:

- Whose knowledge counts?
- Who is considered as 'knowledgeable'?



# Choices & Challenges 2: Who are you?

1 Reflective Scientist



2 Process Facilitator



Photo by [javier trueba](#) on [Unsplash](#)

5 Reflexive Scientist



(6 Project Manager)



Photo by [Firmbee.com](#) on [Unsplash](#)

3 Knowledge Broker



Photo by [Rudy Issa](#) on [Unsplash](#)

4 Change Agent



(Wittmayer & Schöpke 2014)

# Explicitly politicizing your role as a researcher: how action-oriented research can play a role in co-producing counter-hegemonic knowledge

*Table 4.1 Reframing roles for the transition scientist*

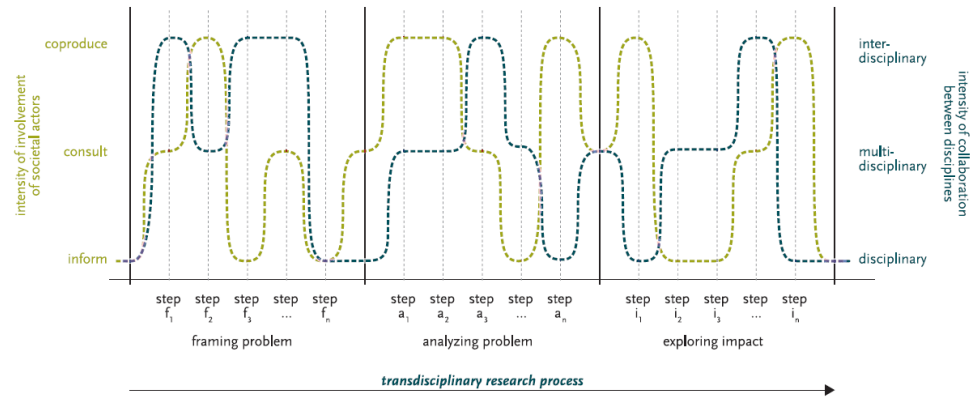
<i>Role of action researcher</i>	<i>Pragmatic action researcher</i>	<i>Transition scientivism</i>
Knowledge broker	<i>Including all perspectives equally</i>	<i>Foregrounding marginalised perspectives</i>
Change agent	<i>Emancipating participants by building trust pragmatically</i>	<i>Emancipate participants by politicising issues</i>
Reflective scientist	<i>Confirm the quality criteria of academic discipline</i>	<i>Challenge quality criteria of academic discipline</i>
Self-reflexive scientist	<i>Reflecting on own normative position</i>	<i>Reflecting on own counter-hegemonic research practices</i>

## Choices & Challenges 3

Which methods & approaches to use?

- Cognitive, workshop-based methods: problem analysis, visioning, backcasting
- Practical hands-on experimentation with re-opening a community centre in a self-organized way

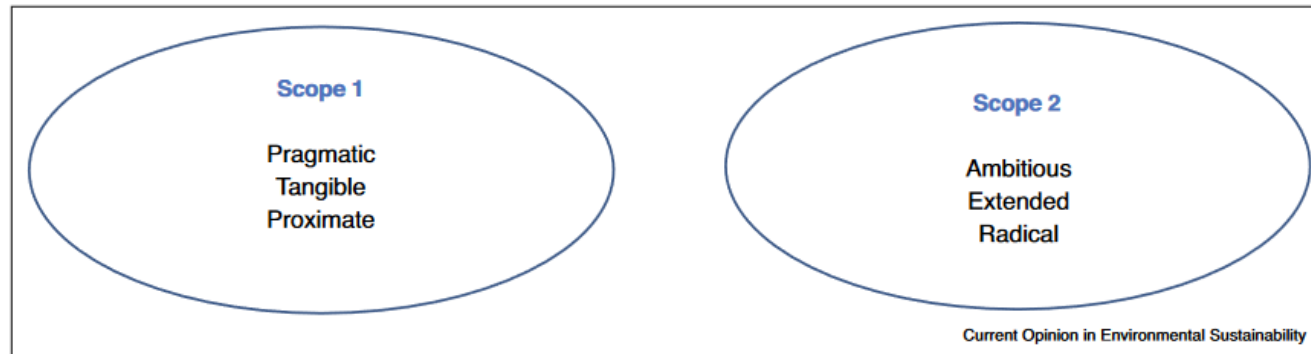
Consequences for in/exclusion;  
quality criteria; ownership...



**FIGURE 4:** Functional-dynamic approach to collaboration in a hypothetical project. The intensity of involvement of societal actors (light green dotted line) and of the collaboration between disciplines (dark green dotted line) varies over the transdisciplinary research process. It depends on the stage, goals, and content of the process as well as its context (further developed based on Stauffacher et al. 2008 and Krütli et al. 2010).

## Choices & Challenges 4: Working within the system to try to change it

Figure 1



Two scopes of ambition for co-production — Scope 1 relates to the production and dissemination of knowledge and services. Scope 2 relates to the transformation of norms and institutional structures within science and society. Literature presents both synergies and tensions between these two outcomes.

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## **What are the questions that you need to ask yourself?**

- What are the societal issues you want to address?
- What is your vision on transformation and the role of cooperative action?
- With whom are you working?
- How/what is the process?
- To which end?
- Caution: challenges ahead



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**Thank you!**

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