

Crisis in Social and Ecological Practices? Experiences from the Research Project "Blocked Transition? Spaces of Thinking and Action in Sustainable Regional Development"

(To be presented on the International Sociology Conference "ENVIRONMENT, KNOWLEDGE AND DEMOCRACY", 6-7 July 2005, Faculty of Sciences of Luminy, Marseille, France; organised by The University of the Mediterranean, Department of Human Sciences, DESMID-UMR Espace and the SHADYC)

The boarder between scientific and popular knowledge in sustainable development

The thesis of the project "*Blocked Transition? Spaces of Thinking and Action in Sustainable Development*" is, that dichotomic, hierarchical patterns of reception, thinking and action are the blockades of sustainable development. They led society into a crisis of the societal relations to nature. To newly form these relations we have to analyse the different connections and interactions between nature and culture. The project will find factors for problem-orientated participation strategies aiming at socio-ecological transformation. Within six work packages we follow an interdisciplinary approach for the projects internal communication as well as a transdisciplinary approach for the co-operation with partners in the region.

Problem-orientation as key concept for participation

The project's region of investigation (the mouth of the river Mulde into the Elbe between the cities of Dessau, Bitterfeld and Wittenberg) offers a well reported history of the nature-culture-relationships and shows strong symptoms of the present crisis.

Our presentation will combine the two work packages *Environmental Spaces* and *Spaces for Learning and Action* of the project "Blocked Transition?" focussing on embedded daily-life knowledge with regard to the factors learning and participation for the actual environmental issue of Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM). We will discuss possibilities to develop spaces for mutual learning between professionals and those, who perform daily-life – the citizens, consumers, workers etc. We call these: "spaces of possibilities". We will present them with respect to dissemination and transfer of knowledge and the performance of democracy in knowledge-based societies.

The place of knowledge within decision making

The overall objective of the project is to identify the blockades in spatial relationships in order to initiate and enhance processes of socio-ecological transformation. For this reason the project explicitly uses a feminist approach to deal with the blockades created by dichotomizing. Any of the dichotomies between nature and culture: using nature and protecting nature, production and reproduction, learning and acting, distributing and participating, everyday knowledge and scientific knowledge are coined by hierarchy and power. The feminist search is directed to hidden, repressed or newly possible relations between the poles of the dichotomic patterns. In this spirit, we work on the following questions:

- How does knowledge get (re-)generated in daily-life and how does knowledge influences it?
- If knowledge is generated in daily life, what starting point must participation have to leave its recent structural "detached spaces" (like round-tables, seminars, virtual conferences etc.) to become part of daily-life practice?
- How will a change of democratic institutions become possible, when old structures and circumstances become obsolete and do no longer give structural support?

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For further information: Please find the English summary of the project under:
www.blockierter-wandel.de (downloads)