

## **EASST 2010, Track 36: Practices and the Environment: Performing Sustainability and Doing STS.**

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### **„Wanted! Research Partner with Problem“ - Transdisciplinary Research between Normative Imaginations and Practical Realisation**

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Over recent years numerous national and international research programs have focused on transdisciplinarity as the central research paradigm, a fact, which also holds for a major Austrian research program on sustainability research. In these programs knowledge production is based upon the assumption that participation of extra-scientific partners during all phases of a research process would improve the quality and enhance the robustness of the outcomes. However, the practical realisation proves to be complex and cumbersome. Neither did citizens or stakeholders necessarily strive for a joint research but rather prefer to get expertise “delivered to their doors”. Nor did they see necessarily the same “problems” as essential to their lives and thus did not see an obvious reason to engage as research partners. Finding partners to do transdisciplinary research thus proved far from being obvious.

In our contribution we want to critically explore the reasons why this ideal of engagement of extra-scientific actors was notoriously difficult to realise. Scientists on the one hand saw this type of epistemic work as complex to reconcile with classical inner-scientific norms (e.g. assessment structures) and with more recent developments like temporalisation of academic work or rigid disciplinary assessment exercises impacting on their lives as researchers. On the other hand also stakeholders were – for multiple reasons – not eager to be active partners in research.

This raises a number of questions: How are such projects aiming to engage citizens or stakeholders embedded in local knowledge cultures, both within science and in society? How do broader national techno-political cultures frame such engagement processes? And in whose interest are such transdisciplinary knowledge production enterprises? Hence, we are going to investigate the tensions arising between the normative imagination of an open innovation through integrating extra-scientific actors, and the practical realisation within the specific techno-political context on the basis of different transdisciplinary projects within an Austrian sustainability research program.

The presentation will be based on interview material and observations from a project studying the culture and practice of transdisciplinary approaches in sustainability research in the Austria context.

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