

Between entanglement and purification: Participatory research imagined and practiced

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Over past decades we have witnessed a growing debate on the limitations of disciplinary organized research with regard to challenges posed by complex societal developments. This has led to calls for changing cultures and practices of knowledge production, in particular in health or environment related research areas. As a consequence specific funding schemes have been created aiming at so-called transgressive, socially robust knowledge mainly through participatory research.

This paper empirically investigates the imaginations and concrete realisations of such a research-funding frame in the area of sustainability research. We understand the funding scheme as a kind of “technology of entanglement”, trying to implement broader socio-scientific imaginations through systematic intertwinement of actors from scientific and non-scientific backgrounds. Its aim is thus to establish an alternative “knowledge regime” – consisting of specific institutional and personal constellations as well as a set of ideologies and pre-scriptions for producing and validating this specific kind of knowledge. Yet, when looking at the *praxis* we encounter “purification work” on several levels. The involved actors – program organizers, scientists and participants alike – apply different strategies to keep knowledge relations disentangled.

Analysing these processes we aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of what often gets labelled as “new modes of knowledge production” as well as the specificities of the knowledge produced. The paper builds on qualitative interviews with program organizers, scientific and extra-scientific research partners in the projects being part of the sustainability oriented research programme.