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Exploring the transformative capacity of place-shaping practices: Editorial

Lummina G. Horlings¹, Dirk Roep², Erik Mathijs³, Terry Marsden⁴

1. Lummina G. Horlings, Department of Spatial Planning and Environment, Faculty of Spatial Sciences, University of Groningen; l.g.horlings@rug.nl ; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8690-7986>

2. Dirk Roep, Rural Sociology Group Wageningen University; dirk.roep@wur.nl" dirk.roep@wur.nl ; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1728-2185>

3. Erik Mathijs, Agricultural and Resource Economics, Division of Bioeconomics, KU Leuven; erik.mathijs@kuleuven.be" erik.mathijs@kuleuven.be

4. Terry Marsden, Director of the Sustainable Places Research Institute, Cardiff University; MarsdenTK@cardiff.ac.uk" MarsdenTK@cardiff.ac.uk

Introduction

This Special Feature offers eight papers collected from the MSCA ITN Programme SUSPLACE (www.sustainableplaceshaping.net) funded by the European Commission. The overall objective of the Programme was to explore the transformative capacity of place–shaping practices in promoting sustainable development. Research was carried out in 15 individual research projects by 15 Early Stage Researchers (fellows) appointed at research institutes across six EU countries under supervision of academic staff. The individual research projects were embedded in a joint Research, Training and Networking programme that, next to the supervision and capacity building of each individual fellow, provided space for joint learning and reflexivity and collaborative work. This resulted in an overall theoretical and methodological approach to place-based sustainable development and joint outputs. As well as journal article a toolkit on arts-based methods for transformative engagement (Pearson et al. 2018) and a guide for policy-makers and practitioners to place-based working and co-production (Quinn and De Vrieze 2019) have been published. The 15 research projects cover a wide range of place-shaping practices embedded in specific settings, exploring pathways to place-based sustainable development. The research has provided insight in the capacity of engaged practitioners and policymakers in shaping sustainable places, as well as the role of researchers. The SUSPLACE Synthesis report (Horlings et al. 2019) provides an overview of the approach, the projects, the output and impact.

Place-shaping occurs in a context of globalization and modernization which has resulted in a world-wide encompassing web of relations and interconnected practices, making goods, capital, knowledge, ideas, humans etc. flow from place to place around the world (Castells 2009). As a result, places are not only being shaping and reshaped, but also have become highly interconnected and entangled. Globalization, as a historic process, is a specific restructuring or transformation of relations, dominated by a capitalist logic, in which development has been disconnected from the specificity of places, causing many of the unsustainabilities we are facing

now. These unsustainabilities include inequalities between places, exclusion of people, poverty, economic decline, resource depletion, ecological hazards and food insecurity. Often notions of place and space are not sufficiently incorporated in debates on sustainability, resulting in place-less approaches to sustainability. A 'place-less' approach is not sensitive to differences in contexts and places and the relations between places. A place-based approach, on the contrary, acknowledges the activities, energies and imaginations of the people (i.e., communities) and how these can have impact on the environment and economy in a more sustainable way (Marsden 2013). Shaping sustainable, resilient or even regenerative places requires the transformation of the dominant relations in which actual place shaping practices are embedded, and the active building of transformative capacities to do so.

The eight contributions in this Special Feature are centred around processes of sustainable place-shaping, which can support a more sustainable and place-based development while strengthening the capacities, self-efficacy and autonomy of people in places (Horlings 2019). The assumption is, that people and places are not powerless victims but are able to express transformative agency in shaping their place to their values, ideas and interests (Roep et al. 2015). However, this raises questions such as: what motivates people to transform (needs), what should be changed or transformed (challenges), how to transform (through innovations) and through which practices transformation can be achieved (Mehmood et al. this issue). The SUSPLACE program has explored these questions through a variety of case studies throughout Europe.

In the next three sections the founding approach of the research programme is explained. First, we discuss why place matters, then the urgent need for a place-based approach to sustainable development and the introduction of the sustainable place-shaping conceptual framework to position this approach in the debate on sustainability transformations. The key dimensions of transformative practices, that together propel sustainable place-shaping, are framed as

intertwining processes of re-appreciation, re-grounding and re-positioning. Section five provides an overview of the articles in this special feature.

Place matters

Places change in a rapid pace and are affected by generic ordering processes such as globalization, and modernization. These processes are often pictured as hegemonic, all determining processes, decreasing or even disregarding the relevance of place: *“There is an overwhelming tendency both in academic and political literature, and other forms of discourse, and in political practice to imagine the local as the product of the global, but to neglect the counterpart to this: the local construction of the global”* (Massey 2005). Some scholars argue that globalization has turned the world into a marketplace, where everything has become a tradable object, favouring some places while others loose. Others argue that the re-ordering caused by globalization has resulted in a disconnection between places of production and consumption (Wiskerke 2009), sustainability problems, and the commodification of land and landscapes (Van der Ploeg 2010). Some scholars have even referred to the ‘erasure of place’ (Escobar 2001), ‘non-places’ (Relph 1976), or ‘place-lessness’ (Auge 1995) as gloomy outcomes of globalization. Meanwhile, institutions which shape our society such as the national state have eroded in the past decades, handing over tasks to market parties and citizens. Society has become liquid as Bauman (2012) argues, power is exercised on a global scale, institutions have become fluid, and the ways we live together is also subject to change. The identity of people and places has become fluid as well. This raises the question: does place still matter?

We would argue that place is more relevant than ever. A key argument is that all structural processes affecting places, such as capitalism, climate change, state decisions, or market relations, have a differentiating impact on how places are actually shaped. This results in place diversity and spatially dispersed sustainability problems, such as resource depletion, economic inequalities, mobilities and social exclusion. Exogenous factors are not merely adopted in a

local context, but result in spatially varied outcomes: 'territories of difference' (Escobar 2008).

These outcomes are strengthened by responses to globalization, as alternatives to the dominant concept of modernization as Escobar argues: *"Even if we emphasize the emplacement of all cultural practices as a result of global generic forces we have to consider (global) capitalism as a cultural practice which varies between places"* (Escobar 2001, p. 43).

Furthermore, a place is not a blank canvas, but the result of the inscription of culture, physical characteristics, and historic and actual human actions, creating inequalities and spatial differentiating. Places are also unequal in the ways power, capacities and resources can be mobilized, something that a local 'politics of place' must take into account (Massey 2004).

Places shape a wide range of opportunities and barriers. The physical shape of places, their infrastructure, ownership and uses, all influence how people can make a living and live their lives and enable or disable future pathways.

Place is also relevant because it has meaning for people. It holds the space for individual values and collective identities of people. A shared sense of place can potentially be a call for action and result in collective care and responsibility of resources (Grenni this issue) although the link between sense of place and action is not a straightforward and causal relation (Soini et al. 2012).

Place is also an arena, an expression of power relations, holding a variety of opinions and interests and potential conflicts, cutting across boundaries of wealth and institutions. It is a bridging notion that helps to understand how humans, as social beings, interact with their environment. Place is also a setting for collective action and co-creation, object of policies that aim to intervene in relations shaping places resulting in new connectivities (Horlings 2018). The human actors in places should not be considered as passive victims of hegemonic processes affecting their place (Long 2001; Tsing 2000). Humans employ individual and collective agency in their everyday practices and co-shape their place of living. By negotiating their engagement in global ordering processes, human actors can alter the web of relations and interconnected

practices which they are part of. Understanding these relations requires *“paying attention to the agency of local actors, whilst also examining the broader economic and social relations – both historical and contemporary – which locate places within wider networks”* (Healey and Jones 2012, p. 212). Human agency is not merely a defensive or reactionary force against global restructuring forces, but a way of re-negotiating the conditions of engagement in these processes; this agency re-assembles places, expressed in grounded practices.

A place-based approach to sustainable development and transformation

There is an urgency for transformations and new (spatial) development trajectories in the context of our unsustainable patterns of living, production and consumption, provoked by processes of globalization, and uneven development. Loss of biodiversity, the depletion of resources and climate change are just some of the consequences. The challenge to develop sustainable pathways for the future has become especially urgent in the wider debates on the depletion of fossil resources and climate change. The simple evidence of a global ambient temperature rise is undisputable. Climate change affects places in different ways (IPCC 2018), resulting in non-linear, complex and partly unpredictable changes, or even a societal collapse as some argue (Bendell 2018). The concept of sustainable development was born from the need to preserve the quality of natural resources for present and future generations. It is commonly perceived as a ‘balancing act’ between planet, people and profit. Embodied in international policy agendas starting from the 1972 Stockholm Conference, the best-known formal definition of the concept is contained in the so-called Brundtland Report ‘Our Common Future’, published some decades ago (WCED 1987). However, in the Brundtland Report the connections between sustainability and notions of space and place remain implicit and underestimated.

Sustainability has been interpreted in different ways (see also Horlings et al. this issue), most often from a systems perspective. A systems perspective acknowledges the different dimensions or ‘pillars’ of sustainability (people, profit, planet) and the complexity of

interconnections between geographical scales and levels of change. Interpreting sustainability in terms of ecological limits respects the ecological boundaries in all human activities and aims at shaping practices that fit within those planetary boundaries (Rockström et al. 2009; Raworth 2007). In other words, the goal is to ensure that no one falls short on life's essentials (from food and housing to healthcare and political voice), while ensuring that collectively we do not overshoot our pressure on Earth's life-supporting systems, on which we fundamentally depend – such as a stable climate, fertile soils, and a protective ozone layer.

Sustainability can, however, also be interpreted as dynamic, political, and deliberately constructed by human actors. This position understands sustainability as negotiated between stakeholders in places. Ideas, wishes, demands and opinions differ between actors involved and these different viewpoints should be respected, while also bringing the implicit normative and political intentions to the surface. Place-shaping initiatives can sustain but also question these intentions.

Regenerative development aims to go 'beyond' sustainability, which is conceived as maintaining the status quo, exploring more balanced relations between society and ecosystems in which we see *"ourselves as part of a co-evolutionary whole, living in symbiotic relationship with the living places we inhabit"* (Mang and Haggard 2016, p. xiv). Drawing from ecology and originating in the design field, the approach to regenerative development and design entails a radical shift in mindset among all inhabitants of a place. The assumption is that the crises which affect our world, create the urgency to actively restore or repair – not just sustain – the social, economic and environmental damage done to the planet. Arguably, efficiency and 'mere sustainability' are no longer enough, and humans need to regenerate the health of places and support the co-evolution of human and natural systems in a partnered relationship. Used in an interdisciplinary perspective there is wide consensus that regenerative practices are born from the uniqueness of a place. Regenerative action initiates transformation and highlights the need

to constantly re-evaluate and adapt to new conditions – an aspect particularly important in the face of rapidly changing climate conditions.

Transformations are rooted in and affect places. Sustainable transformation must accommodate for the heterogeneity and diversity of places, thereby supporting place-based approaches to development. Such place-based approaches are increasingly favoured in policy and science (Barca 2009; Barca et al. 2012; Heley and Jones 2012; Roep et al. 2015; Tomaney 2010; Woods 2011). Although sustainability transformation needs to be rooted in real spaces and time frames, the significance of space and place is not always acknowledged. These debates are often locked in disciplinary discourses, including different ontological and epistemological assumptions and viewpoints, while a more integral interdisciplinary approach is needed to tackle the sustainability challenges of our time.

The ability to adapt effectively to the current sustainability challenges asks for an inherently interdisciplinary 'place-based' approach, building on the specific resources, assets, capacities and distinctiveness of places, which can strengthen the resilience of areas (Barca 2009; Barca et al. 2012). Hence, we need concepts and models of sustainable place-shaping based on the energy and imagination of people as well as the ecology and materiality of places (Marsden et al. 2010). A place-based approach to sustainable development can provide a more systematic understanding of the place-specific connectivity between social-cultural, political-economic and ecological processes that enable or hinder transformations towards sustainable places (Marsden 2012). A place-based approach can also accommodate public participation and negotiation, local knowledge and sense-making, practices and planning to support sustainable development (Horlings 2018). Place-based research can help to understand and explore the transformative capacity of grassroots practices. Like sustainability, transformation as a concept has been interpreted in different ways as well. Building on different strands of literature we consider transformation as the fundamental alteration of a social-ecological system once the current conditions become untenable or undesirable and hence contested (Gunderson et al.

2005; Folke et al. 2005) requiring transformative agency (Westly 2013). This is a radical, bottom-up perspective of cross-sectional change, which includes the personal, practical and political sphere, acknowledging that human activities have to stay within the planetary boundaries (Rockström et al. 2009), while changing the relations between humans and their environment. Conditional for these transformations to occur is a 'deep adaptation' to uncertainty and change, including the emotional and psychological attitudes needed to change awareness and behaviour (Bendell 2018; Hoggett 2019).

Sustainable place-shaping: a conceptual framework

Notions such as place, territory and region have been amply debated in the literature. Researchers have discussed in-depth what a place is and have used a variety of definitions and understandings. Our position here is that places can be considered as socially constructed, while also emphasizing the relevance of path dependency, structuring processes, and physical characteristics in place-shaping processes, resulting in dynamic material as well as immaterial place characteristics (see e.g. Roep et al. 2015; Horlings 2016). While some scholars emphasized the relevance of administrative or governmentally bounded areas, relationally oriented scholars point to the importance of actors, relations, processes, networks and connectivity. Notions such as place as entanglement (Ingold 2008), assemblage of actors (Woods 2015), 'thrown togetherness' (Massey 2005), or place-making (Pierce et al. 2010) express a relational perspective on place, pointing to the relevance of connectivity via social relations stretching beyond administrative boundaries. A relational approach to place has been foundational to the SUSPLACE research programme. This means that places are considered as geographically unbound, as assemblages of social relations. Although places do have some endurance, they are dynamic, continuously changing because of economic, institutional and cultural transformation. Places are thus not essences, but resulting from processes, the outcome of flows and relations. The nature of a place is not just a matter of its internal

(perceived) features, but a product of its connectivity with other places. Places are nodes in networks, integrating the global and the local. A relational notion of place addresses the temporal, spatial and multi-scale interlinkages of concrete issues in places. From a relational perspective places are nodes in a web of unbound relations as well as temporal and spatial expression of place-shaping practices embedded in these relations.

The (perceived) identity of a place is continuously changing; a place is always under construction, never finished, never closed. Therefore, we speak of processes of place shaping. Places are connected and co-evolve, continuously reshaped via processes of change. This approach emphasizes the linkages between geographical scales. Processes which happen on a global and national scale, such as climate change, migration, or the economic and political situation, have local impact. However, the local practices of people can influence higher scale developments: *“As the specificity of place is understood as generated relationally, then there no simple divide between inside and outside, between local and global, between local struggles and wider movements”* (Massey 2004). The relations that shape places are (re)produced by socially, culturally, politically and economically interconnected interactions between humans, their institutions and socio-ecological systems.

Place shaping refers to the capacity to re-localize and re-embed daily lived practices in social-ecological systems and place-based assets in a sustainable way, thus altering the relations between people and their environment. Processes of sustainable place-shaping thus ‘reconnect people to place’ (Horlings 2016). From an actor perspective (Long 2001), it considers three sets of unbound, in time and space differentiating structuring processes that ‘propel’ everyday living: socio-cultural, political-economic and ecological processes (see figure 1). These processes, however, also provide the space for human actors to position themselves and perform place-shaping practices. These practices create connections between nature and society, the local and the global, the rural and the urban (Woods 2011).

Place shaping emphasizes how humans engage themselves with their place of living, connect themselves to the place-specific socio-cultural and bio-physical surroundings and embed their every-day practices to foster resilient social-ecological systems and make their living more place-based and sustainable (Roep et al. 2015). The assumption is that sustainable place-shaping practices potentially embody a transformative capacity, the capability to enforce change and to re-assemble the web of relations practices they are embedded in; and that collaboration, collective capacity-building and self-efficacy are key conditions to utilize the full potential of places and communities towards place-based sustainable development.

Sustainable place-shaping implies the construction of new narratives, novel practices, alternative paradigms, the rise of civic movements, emergence of new collectives and arrangements, and co-creation of knowledge. Examples of deliberate sustainable place-shaping practices studied in SUSPLACE are the commoning of natural resources, promotion of place-based food or crafts, community-owned renewable energy generation, the provisioning of ecosystem services, but also place-based policy arrangements. Sustainable place-shaping is contextualized, situated in specific time-space frames, open to new possibilities and imaginaries and requires not just a change of policies and practices but also a shift in people's awareness, values and attitudes. Such transformative agency cannot be planned and imposed but results from the ways in which humans share and shape their place of living. Investigating and exploring the transformative capacity of sustainable place-shaping practices can reveal how various unsustainability's can be addressed and overcome, providing the ground for place-based sustainable development.

The sustainable place shaping conceptual framework (see figure 2) derived from the general framework presented above has been foundational to the SUSPLACE program and each of the 15 research projects (Roep et al. 2015; Horlings 2016; Horlings 2019). The graph shows how sustainable place-shaping results from the deliberate intervention in socio-cultural, political-

economic and ecological ordering processes. The framework shows how the transformative capacity of place-shaping practices can be explored along three, mutually enforcing dimensions:

- **Re-appreciation.** People attach meanings and values to place and reflect on the relations which they are part of. Processes of re-appreciation can strengthen people's sense of place, which is an umbrella term for the connections and values people hold about their place. Sense of place provides information about which place qualities people consider as worthwhile and what should be preserved. Researchers and practitioners can analyse these meanings to place (Grenni et al. this issue). Re-appreciation is the starting point of awareness of place identity, which can result in a 'proud of place' and a joint mobilization around new storylines and agenda's for the future (Grenni et al. 2019).
- **Re-grounding.** A re-grounding of practices in place-specific assets and resources, can potentially make them more sustainable. Practices of sustainable place-shaping are influenced by wider communities, cultural notions, values, natural assets, technology and historical patterns, illustrating existing variations in institutional and cultural contexts. The challenge of re-grounding is to develop products and innovation based on assets, traditions and place characteristics involving inhabitants and stakeholders. Research can show how actors reflect on and negotiate the conditions of engagement in global processes, developing innovations that support their autonomy and self-efficacy in the daily sphere, contributing to place-based development (Vasta et al. 2019).
- **Re-positioning.** The re-positioning towards the established institutions, or dominant regime such as government and public policies, business and markets and the innovation system evolves by creating experimental spaces or niches. Re-positioning includes a critical perspective on how our economic system is organized and what might be sustainable alternatives that shape places can enhance the quality of life in places. This includes the acknowledgement of 'diverse economies' (Gibson-Graham 2008; Gibson-Graham et al. 2013), beyond the current capitalistic way of organizing markets, which can

change current economic relations. Examples are social entrepreneurship, social services, new currencies, and alternative products. Key questions here are whether these practices can be considered as sustainable innovations in niches, and under which conditions these can be up-scaled. Re-positioning changes the relations between change initiators and institutions resulting in new place-based agreements (Soares da Silva and Horlings 2019)

The deliberate interventions are an expression of how transformative capacity is built, how the relations practices are embedded in, are intentionally transformed, and how space for sustainable place shaping is created. This framework can serve as a heuristic and analytical tool to explore the transformative capacity of place-shaping practices, as has been done in various ways in the eight contributions assembling this Special Feature.

Exploring the transformative capacity of place-shaping practices: contributions to the Special Feature

Although the contributions in this Special Feature have a common foundation, the actual research has been informed and enriched by a wide variety in theoretical and methodological approaches. We distinguish five ways how places are framed and investigated in the respective eight articles.

Place as (virtual) arena. Place is an arena with multiple stakeholders and a site for policy interventions. Place understood as arena sheds light on how social relations shape behavior, practices, and changes in organizations, society, governance, and political-economic systems. This raises questions such as which actors are or should be involved in place-shaping, how to support interaction, restore connections, and build capacities in places to enhance transformation. Soares da Silva and Horlings (this issue) illustrate how sustainable place-shaping can be viewed as co-production in an arena of

actors. The production of renewable energy via a new Wind park in the Netherlands is discussed to analyze the conditions form this co-production.

A place does not have to be a physical space, it can also be virtual. Husain, Franklin and Roep (this issue) show how virtual spaces can be shaped by blockchain technologies, supporting peer-to-peer communication and exchange between businesses, citizens, and governments outside the existing governance realm.

Place as state of mind. In recent years, the debate on sustainability, and particularly on sustainability transformation, has started to recognize the central importance of the 'inner dimension' in achieving sustainable futures, rooted in people's mindsets, values and motivations. People's mindsets influence their attitude, motivation and behaviour towards sustainability. Transformation to sustainability requires 'change from inside-out', which entails a shift in mindsets, engaging with emotions and changing cultural narratives and worldviews (O'Brien 2013). SUSPLACE showed how arts-based approaches and techniques can open spaces of possibility in people's imagination, thereby evoking such a shift in mindsets (Pearson et al. 2018).

Pisters, Vihinen and Figueiredo (this issue) explore the dimension of consciousness in sustainability transformations and how this shapes sustainability and place-shaping. Learning to embody place can potentially result in a stronger connection with a community or the environment and to a shift in consciousness, so that people become more aware of the impact of their actions. Connecting and feeling compassion to oneself and others and creativity in performing tangible actions are key themes here.

Place as narrative, place as imagined. Place can also be interpreted as a socially constructed narrative. A narrative can be understood in two ways. It is a means to make sense of the world, so a way of knowing, but it is also a practice, a way of doing,

using language to build new knowledge via storytelling (Bruner 1986). Places are produced and reproduced by telling stories. A shared sense of place can potentially result in new joint narratives supporting participatory planning and place branding. Grenni, Soini and Horlings (this issue) explore the role of sense of place and place values in the context of sustainable place-shaping and propose a framework to operationalize these in research. Rebelo, Mehmood and Marsden (this issue) analyze how co-development of collective agency via narratives, values and identities can be articulated for creating and promoting a more inclusive representation of place in a (hypothetical) branding exercise.

Place as stage for transformative learning. The engagement of actors in places, building transformative capacities can be viewed from the perspective of transformative learning (Pisters et al. this issue). Conditional for these capacities are enabling resources which refers to the wide array of assets, both tangible and intangible, social entrepreneurs mobilize and co-create, to launch and bring forward novel initiatives in their places. Morrigi (this issue) explores the array of resources that enable and constrain the development of Green Care practices, i.e., nature-based activities with a social innovation purpose. Participants in three in-depth case studies of green care provisioning in Finland were engaged in several stages of iterative learning combining conventional and action-research methods: semi-structured interviews, participatory mapping, and a co-creation workshop. Results show how entrepreneurs in green care resort to a great variety of tangible and intangible resources. Learning is also the key focus in the article of Mehmood et al. (this issue) grounded in the interdisciplinary place-based conceptualization of social innovation. The paper aims to progress a holistic conceptual framework which integrates the active processes of learning,

experiencing, and regeneration to tackle the complex challenges of sustainability. Empirical examples of this agency have been captured in this article from a series of SUSPLACE research projects. In conclusion, the authors associate the interactive nature of agency studied in these projects with sustainable re-learning, re-experiencing, and re-generation processes to reshape places in a transformative way.

Taken together, the contributions in this Special Feature show that among scholars in sustainability science, there is an increasing recognition of the transformative potential of place-based research. In this research, researchers may have a wider and more creative variety of roles. These roles are determined by the researcher's engagement with the subject, and their co-production with other place-stakeholders; the inherent theoretical, normative and methodological choices made; and the researcher's ambitions in contributing to change, and ethical issues. Horlings et al. (this issue) explore the varied roles taken by the SUSPLACE research fellows. Reflecting on the roles of researchers identified by Wittmayer and Schöpke (2014), the authors illustrate how, starting from different theoretical and methodological approaches and their engagement in places and sustainable place-shaping practices, the research fellows have performed and experienced different roles. Based on their findings the frame of the 'embodied researcher' is introduced: a researcher who is engaged in place-based research with their 'brain, heart, hands and feet' integrating different roles during the research process.

In conclusion: reflecting on the contribution of SUSPLACE to sustainability science

We conclude here with some reflections about the contribution of the SUSPLACE programme to sustainability science. Sustainability science was introduced as a specific interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research field not only to understand complex relationships between humans and nature, but also to change these relations towards sustainability. This research field is continuously evolving, and it is now embedded in academia with its own publication forums and educational programmes.

There are a variety of interpretations of sustainability science, but some common elements can be highlighted (Dedeurwaerdere 2014). Sustainability science explicitly aids social transformations by producing knowledge on changing social-ecological systems, but also by transforming knowledge itself (Wiek and Lang 2016).

Methodologically this means going beyond disciplinary perspectives and indeed building substantially upon systems perspectives by incorporating and critically blending place-shaping practices into our conceptual and empirical repertoires.

It employs inter- and transdisciplinary research practices, including participatory action research, the co-production of knowledge and the use of creative methods. But as we see in these contributions, it also needs to go beyond these employments by re-conceptualising and empirically grounding the role of place-based social actions in framing and mobilizing sustainability. It requires a new hybrid vocabulary which transcends binaries like local-global, nature-society, structure -agency. It needs to incorporate why certain actions occur and become successful and endure; and what capacities are needed to re-generate and re-appreciate socio-ecological developments (Marsden and Farioli, 2015). In this sense progressing sustainability science ushers in, as we see here in these contributions, new grounded theories of place as it is indeed 'shaped' over time. Such research contributes to social learning in projects, to collective

social learning, and to learning on the wider societal level. It also, as this special issue demonstrates, involves a spatial and place-based cognition which embodies the inherent diversity and agency of place-shaping practices.

As the sustainability challenges of our time become more pressing, much greater effort is needed to build transformative systems that actively support and encourage significant change (Waddel 2016). This has consequences for knowledge production, and future research needs. The results of recent scholarly work, such as work presented at the Transformation to Sustainability Conference in Dundee in 2017, show a need for a new social contract between science and knowledge, where agendas, decisions and actions are informed by more democratic and co-produced forms of knowledge in dialogue and collaboration between citizens and trans-disciplinary scientific networks.

Such research requires reflexivity and specific skills from sustainability scientists which become more relevant, in order to co-produce knowledge with participants in places. When researchers engage with participants in places, a richer repertoire of insights emerges and communities become prepared for seeing the existence and relevance of ways to act on their situation at hand. Principles of action-learning and elements of participatory action research (Bradbury-Huang 2015) can inform and inspire such research while also bridging the still existent academic divide between theory and practice.

As some of the fellows in SUSPLACE experienced, researching transformation while engaging in places, also entails a personal learning process, including a deep reflection on their values and ways of life. Becoming more aware of ones values and positions can result in a more embodied engagement in place-based sustainability research. The

collection of articles in this SF thus argue for an inclusive approach to place-based research, and for citizen-led place-shaping projects, where researchers are involved as active participants.

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