Putting the European Green deal to work
The governance challenge in sustainability transitions
Global context: unprecedented challenges

1. IPCC: climate change
2. IPBES: biodiversity loss and ecosystem services
3. IRP: unsustainable resource use
4. WHO: environment and health

Complexity, Uncertainty, Risk
A context of risk and uncertainty

European Green Deal: a paradigm shift in politics/policy?

- First climate-neutral continent
- Biodiversity Strategy 2030
- New Circular Economy Action Plan
- Zero pollution strategy
- Farm to fork strategy
- Just transition
- Sustainable European Investment Plan
- Future ready economy - new industrial strategy

The political, economic, investment, ..., priority for Europe
- Strong systemic transitions logic
- Link with sectoral policies
- Interconnected
- Longer time horizon
- Social dimension
- Innovation, digitalization

Governance agenda

Ambitious, innovative, interconnected, systemic
Transforming the Green Deal into (social) action

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Sustainability as a process of societal transitions

- How to improve conditions for well-being?
- Fundamental reflections and policy responses necessary to strengthen social capital, social cohesion, ...
- ... within the limits of our disturbed relationship with natural capital
- Future visioning based on ethical considerations about the future

- Recognizing that current metrics that dominate the debate about economic performance are part of the problem
- Serious innovation needed in how we understand societal change
- Finally doing something about this, after often decades of theorizing...
EUROPEAN CLIMATE LAW
Bringing nature back into our lives

Restoration Nature Based Solutions

EU 2030 Biodiversity strategy

May 2020

#EUGreenDeal

“Making nature healthy again is key to our physical and mental wellbeing and is an ally in the fight against climate change and disease outbreaks. It is at the heart of our growth strategy, the European Green Deal, and is part of a European recovery that gives more back to the planet than it takes away.”

Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission
“Make sustainable products the norm in the EU”

New circular economy action plan launched
What does it really mean?
Catalysing systemic change

- Recognise fundamental drivers and system interlinkages
- Adopt transformative policy frameworks
- Fill crucial policy gaps:
  - Food
  - Land and soil
  - Chemicals
  - Social dimension
- Leverage the power of cities, businesses and communities for society-wide action
Recognizing the scope of systemic challenges & transitions

- **Transformations** should be of a ‘deep’ character
- No ‘silver bullets’ to solve complex challenges.
- We are deeply **locked-in** and entrenched in **social practices and paradigms**
- These can become **barriers to fundamental change**
Governance responses

- Strong vision, needle on the compass (including fundamental reflections on what type of society we want)
- Embracing systemic starting point
- Policy coherence
- Policy consistency
- Engaging
- Strong implementation
- Scaling-up and speeding-up mechanisms
- Emphasis on what we should stop doing
- Knowledge4Action perspective
Understanding wicked problems

Wicked Problems

- Problems are never completely solved
- Every problem is unique
- There is no clear problem definition
- Are multi-causal multi-scalar & interconnected
- Multiple stakeholders with conflicting agendas
- Every wicked problem is connected to others
- Straddle organizational & disciplinary boundaries
- Every solution ramifies throughout the system
- Solutions are not right/wrong, but better/worse
- Can take a long time to evaluate solutions

Based upon Rittel and Webber (1973)
A paradigm to deal with Super-wicked problems?

Super-wicked problems have the following additional characteristics:

1. Time is running out.
2. Policies discount the future irrationally.
3. Those seeking to solve the problem are also causing it.
4. No central authority.

(Kelly Levin, Benjamin Cashore, Graeme Auld and Steven Bernstein, 2012, *Policy Sciences*)
The ‘x-curve’: lacking attention for the **difficult part**

- **Optimisation**
- **Destabilisation**
- **Institutionalisation**
- **Experimentation**
- **Enabling**
- **Stabilisation**
- **Phase out**

**What do we know about this?**
- Data, statistics, indicators, understanding, expertise?
- How is this integrated in policy-making?

**Examples**
- Fossil fuels
- Environmentally harmful subsidies
- Unsustainable taxes
- Unsustainable spatial planning
- Unsustainable inequality and living conditions

Source: Loorbach et al.
Investing in sustainability, not dead-end streets

- Sustainable Finance Taxonomy
- EU Budget
- Stimulus Funds: Next Generation Europe
- European Investment Bank
Societal change: vulnerability, resilience and just transition

Social dimension:
- Underdefined
- Poor knowledge base
- Linked to fundamental debate on distributional issues
- Linking Europe to the rest of the world
EGD: promising a **speeding-up** of the transition

- Urgent challenge
- The EGD will **accelerate** ... the transition needed in all sectors
- More ambitious climate action in coming decade: rapid phasing out of coal and decarbonizing gas.
- To be ready in 2050, decisions and actions need to be taken in the next 5 years
- The transformation (towards a circular economy) is taking place a **too slow pace**.
- The EGD will ... **accelerate** the EU’s industry transition
- **Breakthrough** technologies in Key industrial sectors by 2030. E.g. zero-carbon steel making.
- Rate of renovation of **buildings** is too slow and needs to double.
- **Accelerating** the shift to sustainable mobility
- ...
Mechanisms to speed-up of the transition

- *Race*-to-the-top logic
- From a ‘cost’ to an ‘investment’ logic
- Institutional set-up fit for purpose to stimulate speeding up?
- Phasing-out of non-sustainable practices
- The role of investments and capital: sustainable finance
- Digital society
- Urban setting
- Understanding the cost of the ‘new normal’
- …
Implications for knowledge creation, organisation and use
Developing solutions-oriented knowledge - how

• Developing knowledge that reflects the nature of (super-wicked) problems: systemic; drivers; uncertain; agency; time; scale; ... transition dynamics

• Knowledge co-creation at the science-policy-society interface

• Knowledge use: engagement with academic communities and policy audiences
Developing solutions-oriented knowledge – what

An EU knowledge strategy could help create, organise, communicate, and use diverse knowledge:

- **Complex** environmental change and **systemic** risks;
- **Societal systems** – actors, lock-ins, trends, etc.
- **Transition dynamics** in production and consumption systems
- **Integration**: methods, technology (data intelligence), understanding
- **Future**: foresight, modelling, scenario’s, expertise
- **Early warning** systems: harms and opportunities
- **Practice-based evidence**: innovations, impacts, successes, failures at various levels
- **New knowledge skills**, infrastructures, institutions
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Yes, ...

... if ...

... but ...

... and ...