Report on Academic Transition Platform Meeting #1

Budapest, 19 September 2014
DISCUSSING SUSTAINABILITY TRANSITIONS IN BUDAPEST

Background

This document is a brief overview of presentations and discussions that took place during the first Academic Platform Meeting, held in Budapest on September 19th 2014. Academic Transition Platforms are regular events organized in the framework of the Accelerating and Rescaling Transitions to Sustainability (ARTS) research project. ARTS is a research project which aims to benefit theory, policy and practice related to accelerating sustainability transitions. Transition Platforms bring together researchers from the ARTS project, as well as students, lecturers and researchers from local universities.

Presentations and discussions

On Friday September 19th 2014, the ARTS project organized the first Academic Transition Platform (ACP) at Svent Istvan University in Budapest. The Academic Transition Platform followed the Transition Platform organized one day earlier. 40 students, researchers and external participants attended the event and discussed the scientific approach behind the ARTS project. The day started with a welcome by Dr. Csaba Fugarassy, followed by an introduction into the ARTS project and sustainability transitions by Dr. Niki Frantzeskaki.

Hereafter, Mr Tamás Fleischer PhD, researcher at the Research Centre of Economic and Regional Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, presented the Budapest sustainable mobility plan in the development of which he was involved. During his presentation, Mr. Fleischer critically reflected upon the ambitions and debate they had on the role of policy in influencing mobility in the city. He outlined the challenges of Budapest in terms of growing mobility use, pressures on the infrastructure, the development of green mobility and increasing the use of public transport. Finally, Mr. Fleischer gave some interesting critical reflections upon the political culture as well as the distance between formal policy processes and stakeholder engagement, and questioned how sustainable development was interpreted within the plan and raised some questions regarding the notion of transitions.

After that Prof. Derk Loorbach reflected upon the presentation and introduced the transition concept and the idea of transition management. He emphasized the scientific basis underlying transition studies and the use of transition lenses as analytical instruments to try to understand complex societal challenges. The concept was debated mainly amongst the researchers, asking how the concept could be applied in Hungary, and what its relevance was. When the discussion was guided towards the
current sustainability questions and the role of research and researchers herein, it seemed that there had not been much experience with a more activist type of research. It also proved difficult to stimulate an active discussion in which the students were also engaged.

After a short break, the set-up of the room was changed after which the participants sat in a circle to better allow for an informal discussion that engaged all participants. It became apparent to the ARTS researchers, mainly from western European universities, that in Hungary students were mainly expected to quietly listen to the lecturers and professors. The facilitators of the discussion actively addressed this and invited the students individually to respond to the question to provide an example of sustainability transition from their daily experience. Most of the participants in this session gave good examples around waste separation, renewable energy, food and housing, providing an interesting insight into local sustainability initiatives. These specific examples then led to a more general discussion on challenges to transform the education system and wider societal culture.

It seemed that the Hungarian society is in many ways still very hierarchical and that the old communist education system still casts a shadow, limiting critical debate and bottom-up initiative. These are some reasons why younger generations are not stimulated within formal institutions like universities to become entrepreneurial and develop their own ideas and position. In addition participants mentioned that it was socially risky to develop social innovations that might conflict with formal policy or with powerful economic interests. It is therefore often better to stay under the radar and not become too successful or visible. The distance between the sustainability projects by formal governance actors and citizen-led transition initiatives was thus perceived as large and difficult to cross. This discussion thus illustrated that sustainability transitions require supportive, open and trusting political and economic conditions as enabling environment, and that transition initiatives also struggle to create those.

Site visit of incubator

After lunch, the group left the facilities of Svent Istvan University and went to visit a sustainability and innovation incubator that recently was established between the university and local government, by means of EU subsidies. The group visited the place, a new building, in which Csaba Fogarassy presented the ideas and strategy behind the incubator. Then Prof. Loorbach reflected upon the presentation, also following up with ideas from the discussions of the Transition Platform held one day earlier. He asked if the scope should not be broadened to include also transition initiatives and social innovations rather than focus only on technological startups.

The group discussion then also asked to what extent the incubator itself was not a symbol of the formal approach that was regularly questions over the two days: establishing a new sustainable project with a focus on technological innovation with external subsidies. This instead of reusing an existing building and starting with the emerging social and technological innovations in an area. This might help to make such an initiatives more rooted in an area, foster engagement, have a better sustainability performance.
and potentially might have a more lasting and profound impact on local challenges. This critical debate thus highlighted and discussed different approaches on how to kick-start sustainability transitions.

For more information on the research project, please visit: www.acceleratingtransitions.eu
Research on Sustainability Transitions in Budapest

19 September 2014, Gödöllő, Hungary

Szent István University, Páter Károly str.1, 2100 Gödöllő
Földszinti Rektori Díszterem (Main building, Rector’s Meeting Hall, downstairs)

During this meeting we aim to bring together researchers and experts to share their sustainability experiences and research results. Participants are invited to discuss:

- Challenges and opportunities for achieving urban sustainability,
- How urban infrastructures are updated and designed,
- How innovative action is taken up from actors and groups of actors that can transform how systems of provision operate and are organised.

Let’s come together during this meeting to learn from each other.
Let’s discuss and co-create a sustainable planning concept or sustainability transitions Research Agenda for Budapest.

Registration

This event is free of charge but registration is required. To register, please contact Linda Szőke at linda890206@gmail.com.
AGENDA

8.45 Coffee/Registration
9.00 Welcome and round of introductions (Dr. Csaba Fogarassy)
9.15 Presentation: The research mission of ARTS project (Dr. Niki Frantzeskaki)
9.30 Presentation: Planning for Sustainability in Budapest (Prof. Tamás Németh - President of Hungarian Academy of Science Environmental Committee)
10.00 Challenges for urban sustainability transitions in Budapest
   Messages to work towards in today’s workshop (Prof. Derk Loorbach)
10.15 Workshop Session: Challenges identified from current research on sustainability and sustainability transitions in Budapest, Climate Council
11.15 Coffee/ Tea break
11.30 Plenary: Small groups report back to the group (Facilitating Prof. Derk Loorbach)
12.30 Lunch
13.10 Transportation to Gödöllő Incubation Centre (site visit)
13.30 Discussion: The practice of sustainability in Budapest and the agglomeration-Ivett Tatárné Varga (Coordinator of International and EU Affairs, Municipal Advisor)
14.00 Opportunities for urban sustainability transitions in Budapest
   Messages to spin the roundtable discussion (Prof. Derk Loorbach)
14.15 Roundtable with European experts and low carbon fan students: Opportunities for urban sustainability transitions in Budapest (Facilitating Prof. Derk Loorbach)
15.00 Wrap up and mapping of common research agenda
How to reach the venue:

Gödöllő is a short 35 minute train ride from Budapest city centre on the suburban or regional trains. Trains run during the weekdays every 30 minutes.

By train
Take train at Keleti railway station to get to Gödöllő. Walk 6 minutes to the University.

By Suburban train
Take Suburban train at Örs Vezér square. Get off at the last stop. Walk 6 minutes to the University.

There is a wide range of accommodation available in Budapest, visit your preferred online travel website, (travelocity.com, orbitz.com, etc.) to find a hotel that suits your requirements.

Accommodation in Gödöllő
Erzsebet Kiralyne Hotel
2100 Gödöllő, Dózsa György út 2
http://www.ekhotel.hu/index-en