

# Grassroots innovations for sustainable consumption

## *Plan of research*

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### Glossary

#### **Diffusion**

The different ways in which innovations grow and translate between contexts.

*Based on Seyfang 2009*

#### **Second-order learning**

Learning relating to a problem itself, rather than its solution, and which has application in other contexts than the immediate one.

*Based on Hegger et al. 2007*

#### **Framing**

The unconscious structuring of thought and speech. Frames include semantic roles, relations between roles and relations to other frames. E.g. a university frame includes the roles of professors, faculties, buildings, seminars, learning, libraries, rabbits, etc.

*Based on Lakoff 2010*

#### **Narrative**

Selecting, organising, connecting and evaluating events as meaningful for a particular audience. Ordering events into a sequence which is contingent for later actions and meanings.

*Based on Kohler Riessman 2008*

#### **Discourse**

Instances of communicative action through spoken, written or bodily language. Discourse is both the source and result of knowledge about language.

*Based on Johnstone 2008*

## **1. Introduction**

Grassroots innovations is an emerging field of research which examines the role of civil society activists and organisations in the transition towards sustainable livelihoods. Sustainability transitions in socio-technical systems imply a radical restructuring of social and technological relationships, and grassroots innovations could play a crucial role in providing alternative ways of thinking about, and practical solutions to, sustainable consumption. Transitions theory maintains that alternative sustainability visions are key in driving participation in and growth of sustainability initiatives, and as such grassroots innovations are sources of alternative visions and practices that support sustainability transitions. Focusing on social learning rather than technical solutions, grassroots innovations are thus seen as catalysts of 'new' knowledge and learning processes. As different types of alternative knowledge become embodied in sustainable consumption practices, grassroots innovations can be conceptualised as sources of transformative knowledges and cultures.

This research project aims to examine the ways in which grassroots innovations foster sustainability cultures and worldviews, and how different visions of sustainability shape the kind of action grassroots initiatives undertake, addressing a need to integrate explanations of cultural context, the role of visions, and socio-psychological factors into analyses of grassroots innovations. This document outlines how I intend to tackle the question *how do sustainability narratives shape socio-material relations in grassroots innovations* using narrative and action research methods to create a portfolio of qualitative case studies for comparison.

Section 2 and 3 provides an overview of the literature on sustainable consumption and transitions theory, while Section 4 examines the emerging literature on grassroots innovations, situating this new field within the broader academic literature and exploring other related research. The next section details the rationale of the study and specifies research questions. Section 6 outlines the methodological approach the study will take and Section 7 articulates the contribution of the research.

### **1.1 Contribution**

As an emerging field within sustainability studies that is concerned with understanding the formation, stabilisation and diffusion of novel, bottom-up sustainability experiments, grassroots innovations examines the social learning processes connected with change processes. First findings from this new research agenda show that theoretical developments are required in order to understand internal niche dynamics and diffusion processes better, while more research on the role of visions, cultural context, and socio-psychological factors is needed. By viewing grassroots innovations as sites of alternative knowledges and cultures, and by examining the ways in which grassroots innovations provide alternative visions and practices that support the transition sustainability, this research project aims to bridge these gaps. Exploring how sustainability visions are narrated differently among grassroots actors and investigating how they are expressed in action, this study hopes to contribute to understanding if, when and how grassroots innovations are sites of change for deeper transitions in ways of knowing and being.