

THE ROLE OF INNOVATION IN A SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL TRANSITION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION



Knowledge

What role innovation in a "purposive" (not evolutionary) socio-ecological transition? And, what kind of innovation is most necessary?

Link to an online resource :

<http://www.neujobs.eu/publications/socio-ecological-transition-and-employment-implications/role-innovation-socio-ecologica>

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Daniel Hausknost, Will Haas, University of Klagenfurt, Working paper for the Neujobs European project (2013)

Abstract:

This paper analyses the role of innovation and innovation policy in a purposive socio-ecological transition of the European Union.

More precisely, we ask which kinds of innovation will be required to achieve the aim of a sustainability transition and which kinds of innovation, conversely, will fail to deliver the desired outcomes.

While it seems obvious that any such transition will inevitably have to involve a variety of technological, social and systemic innovations, much of the relevant literature exhibits a somewhat uncritical trust in the powers of innovation that needs to be qualified and critically reassessed. The paper analyses three dominant strands of literature, namely the multi-level perspective on socio-technical transitions (MLP), the innovation systems approach (IS) and the long-wave theory of techno-economic paradigm shifts (LWT). All three are epistemologically rooted in evolutionary economics, which provides them with an understanding of social change that is difficult to reconcile with the task of a purposive and goal-oriented transformation of society.

This tension, we will argue however, can be quite productive since it protects us, on the one hand, from taking up a voluntaristic and romanticist position that is entirely inebriated by the normative purpose of change, and on the other from a technocratic position that puts unwarranted trust in the powers of progress and market forces.

In order to reap the fruits of this productive tension we need to confront the innovation literature with the biophysical reality of the socio-ecological transition of industrial societies from a fossil energy regime to a post-fossil one and recover the political core this transition will have to consist of.

The type of innovation most urgently needed for a successful sustainability transition, we argue here, will be of a political and not of a technological kind.