

What do we mean by the term 'Governance' in the context of the Rural Alliances project?

In rural areas there is a great opportunity for businesses, communities and the public sector to jointly make decisions that will have positive contributions to rural life, employment and the natural environment.

Good governance is a process that engages residents in such a way that they have opportunities to be involved with the decision-making processes in a range of ways, from being well informed, being consulted, to actually helping to make decisions and then carrying them out.

What are the challenges and the opportunities?

Most public sector bodies are facing difficult financial times at present having to prioritise their budget allocations to deliver a wide range of services. At the same time the overall standard of living and the expectations of people in North West Europe are increasing. In order to meet these demands and respond to the challenges a new approach and a closer working relationship between the public sector, service utilities, rural businesses and their communities is called for.

Rural areas have experienced the loss of schools, post offices, hospitals, public toilets and public transport provision. Utilities, such as telephone companies have closed many rural public telephone boxes; at the same time energy companies are seeking a more balanced provision of renewable energy for the future.

Rural businesses and local communities have the potential to work together with the public sector and utility companies to provide a range of services through new ways of working and decision-making.

Example

A farming alliance in Belgium has a contract to clear snow at Brussels Airport. The farmers have the skills to drive large machinery, they are not able to farm when it is snowing and Brussels Airport authority does not require a standby force any longer.

This is a great example of how the public sector and rural businesses can work together.

There are still many challenges, but these bring about opportunities too. Rural communities are made up of people with a huge and diverse skills set and people with time and energy, some that have retired to the countryside.

Ideas already in place include:

- turning public telephone boxes into mini libraries,
- placing post offices and tourist information centres in local shops,
- contracting out health services,
- creating new opportunities for provision of care for the elderly:

These are rural issues solved by local people.

The essential ingredient for this new wave of governance and service provision to operate is to establish new ways of working, decision-making and clear roles and responsibilities. This often requires policy changes, trust, new contracts and new business/community structures to deliver the services. At the same time there is a growing desire by many citizens to realign the balance between paid work, domestic work, and volunteering and leisure time. This provides an opportunity for closer working relationships between rural communities and public bodies, with the challenge to find innovative ways to meet the expectations of services and quality of life.

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The Oisterwijk Model

August 2013

The Oisterwijk Model is all about “doing democracy” from the bottom up.

It is a model inspired by the town of Oisterwijk in North Brabant, the Netherlands, where people have been working together in a true spirit of community enterprise, encouraging and stimulating events and activities of collaboration and investment in the future. The municipality of Oisterwijk recently celebrated its 800-year jubilee of obtaining city rights and the area used this historic moment to propel a series of activities and events to bring the inhabitants together and celebrate success.

The “Oisterwijk Model” has been developed to map the process of this collaboration. It can be seen as a model of “how to prompt communities into taking collective initiatives with the aim to come out stronger together.”

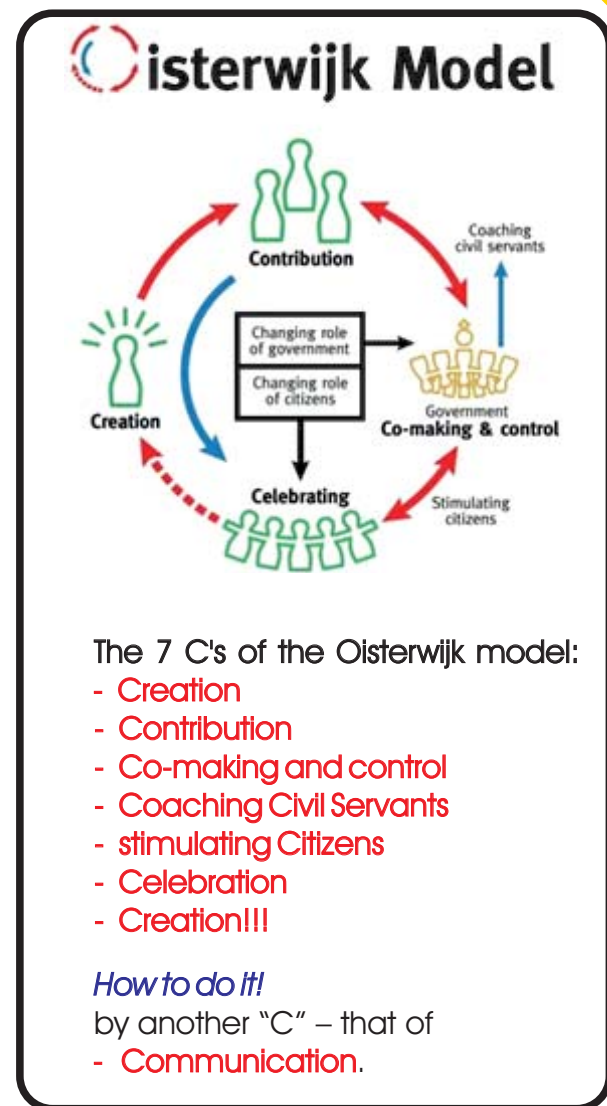
The Oisterwijk Model has developed during a time of huge societal, economic and environmental upheaval for North Western Europe. The region has seen a recession combined with increasing demographic pressures, overwhelmed public health services, increasing costs of energy prices and a reaction by governments towards withdrawal of funding and intervention, leading to an increase in the sense of “self-direction and self-determination” from local communities, particularly in rural areas.

The Oisterwijk Model shows how to take responsibility for its own development and initiate change at a local level through collective endeavour. This is not always easy, as Local Government at times can restrict independence of action through legal and bureaucratic processes. The model demonstrates the clear need for the involvement of Civil Servants, as the community cannot act in isolation from the wider political spectrum. A balancing act between independence and initiative, and approval and support from Local and Central Government is a key part to bottom-up local development, and one which the Oisterwijk community has worked hard to achieve.

Conclusion

The 7 C's of the Oisterwijk Model demonstrate the pathway to developing and maintaining sustainable democratic initiatives. This is not always an easy relationship to navigate. “Giving room to citizens’ initiatives who collectively decide to tackle a problem is sometimes at odds with political and administrative practice.”* The Oisterwijk example demonstrates that the best way to navigate this difficult relationship is by another “C” – that of **Communication**.

Only through constant dialogue can citizen's initiatives be understood and supported by the authorities and in this way a middle ground can be found between bureaucracy and self-determination.



Examples of community endeavours mapped by the Oisterwijk model

Moergestel Cycle Village

Moergestel, a village with almost 6,000 inhabitants, faced the common problem of a ring road built with a cycle track along it, meaning that travellers did not pass into the village any more, leading to a loss in revenue for local businesses. The village pulled together to re-brand themselves as a cyclist-friendly village and to re-attract people. A "Cycling Festival" was developed, which now attracts hundreds of cycling enthusiasts each year, and is currently developing other angles, such as roller-blading and long-distance walking.

Hoogeloon Care Cooperation

The village of Hoogeloon has around 2,200 inhabitants, many of them older people who were previously being moved to residential homes out of town. The residents were unhappy with this and felt they would be happier and more independent if they could stay in their village in old age. In order to do this, the inhabitants would have to do it themselves, as the authorities did not have funding or an agenda for this. A co-operative began on a small scale by providing social dinners but soon developed into a garden service, a drop-in office, and has now been able to develop two houses with room for 14 inhabitants. There are plans to develop more housing, and space is now available for people with dementia and other disabilities.

Esbeek Cooperative

A village called Esbeek really did spend all their money in the local pub - by buying it! When the village heard that the local Schuttershof pub would be closing due to lack of revenues, over three hundred families contributed their own money to purchase it. As the village had no community centre or common meeting space, they felt that the closure of the pub would threaten the very heart and soul of the village. A co-operative began, which not only purchased the pub but has also developed a "starter-home" initiative to build 24 houses for young people who could not otherwise afford to buy homes in the village.

Magic ingredient!!

There is one very clear magic ingredient in each of these success stories - that of a "Champion":

- Moergestel cycle festival was initiated and driven by Jan Vriens, a retired entrepreneur who had many connections in the area and could spend time pulling people and actions together to coordinate the growth of community participation.
- In Hoogeloon, Ad Pijenborg and others have been instrumental in ensuring that the older people throughout the community participated in meetings and decision-making, and the energy of a few dedicated and enthusiastic retired inhabitants has transformed a dream into a reality.
- Piet Verhoeven has dedicated much of his life to ensuring that his village of Esbeek remains vibrant and attractive to people of all generations, and even built the support of enough people to enable the cooperative to purchase the local pub.

*Reference:

Ted van de Wijdeven, Marcel Boogers and Laurens de Graaf, "Democracy of Action in N Brabant" in P Spapens; "Samen Sterk Op ZN Brabants", 2012.

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Timebanking Wales: <http://www.timebankingwales.org/>

Spice: <http://justaddspice.org/>

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Het Groene Woud Participation Principle

What is Het Groene Woud Participation Principle?

The Het Groene Woud region in the province Noord-Brabant (Netherlands) is always working from the principle of participation. It basically shows the importance of participation and what factors contribute to the success of participation.

In the traditional way public funds are invested in regional values. Entrepreneurs develop new product-market combinations (PMCs) based on those values. The revenues generated by the entrepreneurial economy provide private return. The Het Groene Woud Participation Principle is, through the participation, closing the cycle between values and economy as much as possible, so that the private revenues are partly invested in maintaining and developing the values again. It then turns into 'feeding the goose that lays the golden eggs', i.e. those who benefit invest.

The success of that Participation depends on the product of the Help structures (how the participation is organised; in Dutch *Hulp*), the participation Group (number of participants; in Dutch *Graad*) and the Way (how to contribute, through business models or in kind; in Dutch *Wijze*).

In short: P=HxGxW. The greater participation, the more the cycle of values and economy is closed. If one or more of the factors is 0, there is no participation and therefore no cycle.

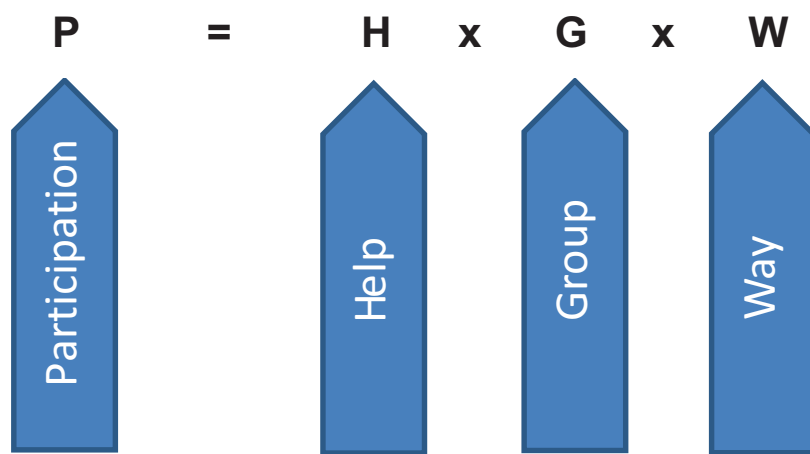
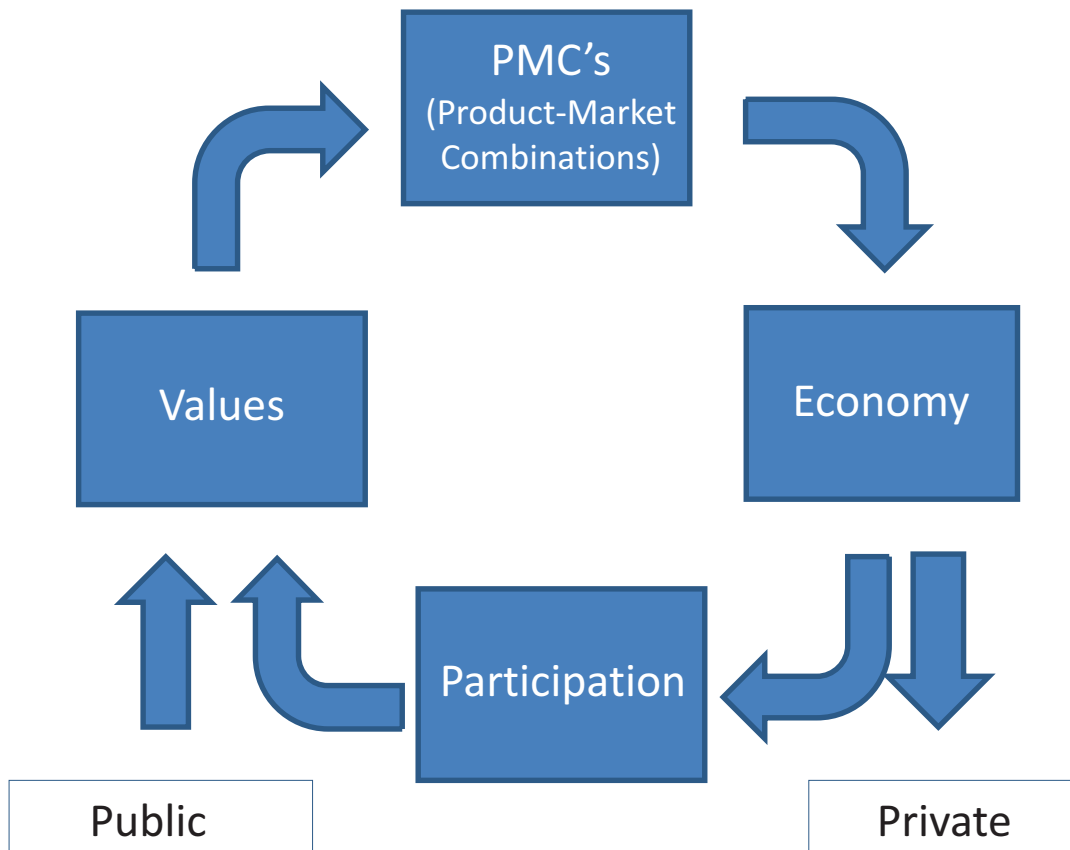
In addition, it remains important that also government continues its participation. The government sets the framework and there still are in many levels (less) grants available.

What is the importance for Rural Alliances?

This principle brings into focus the importance of participation and the factors that influence and can be influenced. With this knowledge, anyone can understand the success of participation.

Terminology

Values	The special values in the region. The values of eg nature, landscape, cultural, heritage, liveability
PMC's	Product-Market Combinations
Economy	Revenues proceed from the PMCs
Participation	Forms of cooperation, the do-democracy, citizens' initiatives. Participation and the degree of investment ensures that the cycle is closed again
Help	Help with organising and facilitating by organisations (eg Regional House, Cooperatives, local fund agricultural nature association). Help in the form of networks and alliances, Familiarising
Graad	The extent of the participants in the community building on the knowledge, pride and experience of one's own environment. Ambassadors also contribute to participation
Wijze	Thus the manner is about ways participants can contribute through business models (eg local account, shop, visitor-payback, crowdfunding) or in kind (eg exhibition, volunteering, rights and obligations, friends, crowdsourcing, crowdsourcing).



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Governance and how to act as government

Governance occurs in three broad ways:

- Through networks involving public-private partnerships (PPP) or with the collaboration of community organisations;
- Through the use of market mechanisms whereby market principles of competition serve to allocate resources while operating under government regulation;
- Through top-down methods that primarily involve government and the state bureaucracy.

To distinguish the term governance from government:

“governance” is the concrete activity that reproduces a formal or informal organisation.

Major issues within the European Rural context are [1]:

- The bottom-up, community development approach (linked for instance to the Community Led Local Development (CLLD) of the EU);
- Innovation and experiment;
- Modernization through information technologies (e.g. broadband);
- Social enterprise, which may especially suit rural areas (e.g. social farming);
- Financial, training, advice and support for small, medium-size and micro-enterprise for rural entrepreneurship;
- 'Green growth': the greening of economic activities in rural areas (e.g. organic production; shorter supply chains and local trading, such as farmers markets; renewables and biomass; insulation (the low-carbon economy); quality food production);
- The development of infrastructure (e.g. transport);

The challenges in the European rural environment are immense. There is need for investment in rural areas in the key sectors of transport, information technologies, quality public services, rural firms and amenity conservation and development; and improved governance, characterized by rural policy proofing, horizontal cooperation across government departments and agencies; and the involvement of a broad range of actors, including civil society.

Building Alliances between local- and regional governments, businesses and communities and building, with these alliances, projects and programmes which are interconnected, visionary and linked to the major issues in the rural context is the challenge. The role of local and regional government is changing from the dominant regulating and decision-making body to the facilitating and networking structure, linking key players at local and regional level, stimulating vision building and innovation. New governance roles are relevant at all levels. The role of local and regional non-governmental initiatives is to strengthen to become part of a larger strategy of change in constructive societal innovation together with government and other community stakeholders.

This is taking place in a societal transition in which the 'old' structures will resist the needed change and rules and regulations have been designed for a more top-down and less innovative and experimental approach.

[1] Source: Employment and social inclusion in rural areas: a fresh start, Dr. Kathy Walsh and Brian Harvey, March 2013 and European Structural and Investment Funds, Guidance on Community Local Development, version June 2014.

Governance issues for local governments/policy makers:

- Build trust with societal partners / stakeholders: businesses, community organisations and citizens are dominantly competent to deal with societal challenges;
- Develop a step-by-step policy that incorporates all relevant partners in developing a common vision, including the chosen representatives;
- Celebrate local and regional success and promote the new leadership (bottom-up);
- Promote a style of government and governance that is practical (learn by doing) and puts societal stakeholders central;
- Organise training and support to professionalising skills for networking and processes;
- Provide support to social experiments, constantly searching for change (within the strategic themes, but also in 'ownership' and 'responsibility');
- Network at regional, national and European level, linking up with like-minded experiments, organisations and funding opportunities to fuel local change;
- Stimulate and support local initiatives building sustainable business-cases and steer away from government dominated/subsidised programming;
- Select leadership that is competent in providing guidance and support to these type of processes.

Governance issues for local governments/policy makers:

Understanding societal change and transition is a vital aspect of building sustainable rural alliances. They will have to be or become part of a larger change strengthening local rural communities, building strong business cases, creating income and relevance to local partners while sustaining and strengthening the social and ecological environment in which they function. They will have to be able to overcome resistance within or from the system and will need enough endurance to grow from a small marginal initiative into a mainstream alternative.

- Their strategy and action will have to serve local purposes;
- Actions should be part of a local development strategy;
- The local development strategy should be drawn up based on a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats), and the identification of local needs [2];
- The local development strategy should promote links between local development actions;
- Local development strategies should be 'integrated and multi-sectorial'.

Facilitating rural alliances means that support structures will have to be put in place which will be able to provide support during their development, from the initial stage to the stage of independence.

- Identify the pioneers. Show respect and share training/exchange. Allow for space for development, experiments and risks;
- When the initiative is functioning in its early stages, with a core group and vision, provide support through recognition, attention, networking, debate;
- When the initiative is breaking through, provide institutional links, seed money, become an initial customer, make use of their services;
- Becoming a fully-fledged project or programme means a professional approach. Paid staff might start to compete with volunteers while there is immediate need for quality, transparency, increase of scale. Support in building a strong business case, in legal and financial matters, can help to build a fully-fledged professional structure in local ownership;

[2] Linked to the Rural Vibrancy Measuring Index and to the Skills Plotting Method of the Rural Alliances Project.

- Scaling up to regional or national level might be the following step. Taking time to reflect, to work out a joint strategy and policy and share this with local stakeholders can help to make the right choices;
- The pioneers move on: Each initiative needs its own pioneers. People, who against all odds, initiate an action, build up an organisation, have an enormous drive. There will be a stage when there is need for other people, with more managerial or policy oriented focus for instance. Recognise this change and help the pioneers to move on.

Game changers:

One of the challenges is to build real 'game-changers' in the local development strategies. Game changers interfere with the systemic challenges of, for instance, the market. An example of a game-changer is an Energy Service Company owned by the local/regional community. Profits from energy efficiency and energy saving will flow back into a revolving fund that will be used locally and regionally to invest in energy saving and technology, which in its turn brings in extra money. Another example might be the combination of the (rapidly growing) delivery system of packages and public transport in rural regions. A third example is cooperative broadband, in which community and business invests jointly in building a strong rural broadband system.

The market system is adapted in a way that strengthens local and regional economy, environment and society.

- The local and regional strategy focusses (amongst others) on circular economy;
- The projects and programmes are linked to sectorial and societal transitions towards a circular economy;
- There is a joint effort to build new business models which strengthen the regional economy, the environment and social cohesion and initiative;
- Subsidies are mainly used for innovation.

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Transition theory: change causes resistance

Most of our alliances are trying to change. In many cases their changes cause resistance. For example, local energy cooperations generate solar power, but the grid can't handle it and/ or legislations makes it less profitable. In this fact sheet we briefly explain the transition theory. This theory describes how changes in society work on three levels (micro, meso and macro), and how these levels influence each other.

Levels within socio-technical systems

Most literature recognises that there are three separate levels that Transition Management must work within; Landscape, Regime and Niche:

- **Niche** (Micro) is the level or 'area' at which the space is provided for radical innovation and experimentation. This level is less subject to market and regulation influences and can facilitate the interactions between actors that support product innovation.
- **Regime** (Meso) refers to the dominant practices, rules and technologies that provide stability and reinforcement to the prevailing socio-technical systems.
- **Landscape** (Macro) refers to the overall socio-technical setting that encompasses both the intangible aspects of social values, political beliefs and world views and the tangible facets of the built environment including institutions and the functions of the marketplace such as prices, costs, trade patterns and incomes.

Niche (micro level)

The micro-level is the area in which most of 'our' rural alliances operate. The energy association cooperative, a collaboration around a cycle route in the region, the local health organisation or the tourism initiative, almost all focus themselves on their immediate surroundings. They mobilize people, bring parties together and seek finance.

They formulate a vision, strategy and plan of action and form the spot where the 'action' takes place. They are the many thousands of local initiatives that fit into their local environment. They are the source of social change.

Regime (meso level)

The municipality or region belong with the meso level, but also education, research institutions, the larger business organisations and of course the larger business communities and financial institutions. In the transition theory, this is also called the 'regime'. This is where the systems (financial, organisational, political) reproduce themselves. Here you find the rules and structures that can make the innovation difficult or easy, that give those local initiatives the space or just restrict them.

Landscape (macro level)

And thirdly there's the macro level. These are the major social changes, the trends. They are so large that we hardly have any (direct) influence on them. Technological change, such as the exponential increase of the speed and memory power of chips and computers. Or social change, such as individualisation and change of standards and values. But also increasing scarcity of resources, climate change and increases in scale are associated with this macro level. Like the demographic trends, including ageing and the migration of young people to cities.

Three levels - mutual interaction

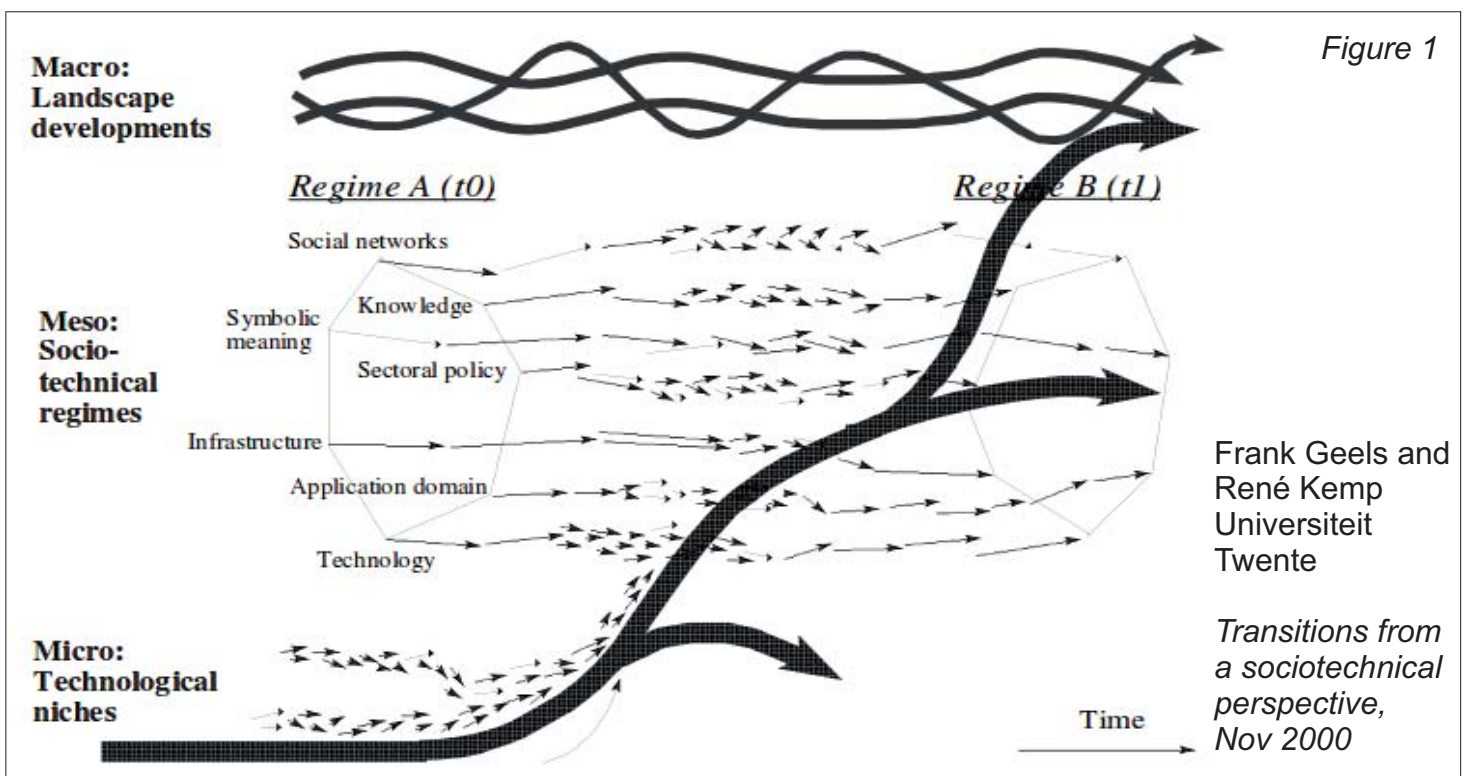
These three levels have a large degree of mutual interaction. The macro-level has a huge impact on the choices you're able to make at the meso and micro levels. The acceleration of our data traffic makes it possible to be connected with the world from the barn or in the attic via broadband. We see the number of patents in large companies declining and more and more small businesses growing through the electronic highway. Ageing is changing the demand for care while climate change and scarcity of resources encourages the development of a low-carbon economy. The micro-level offers inspiration and creativity. Local initiatives are able to break through, scale up and professionalise, thus changing society. And over time, the micro-level can even lead to change on a large scale, such as large scale use of solar and wind energy really changing the playing field of the energy landscape.

For example, solar energy is continuously becoming cheaper. That's a macro development. The technology is improving steadily while the market is growing in volume.

Solar energy is ideal for a cooperative approach, in which citizens invest together to get even lower costs and share returns. That's a micro development. And if those returns are used in revolving resources in order to reinvest in even more renewable energy, then you get a change of the system (a game-changer).

The meso level is the most difficult to get along with. That is the level in which the vested interests are organised. Here, consideration is given as to whether financing, spatial planning, granting of permits, and facilitation also can and should be permitted. That is where the administrator, the officer, researcher or financier offers space or just puts the brakes on. Classically seen, the meso level is where the focus of 'governance' lies because that's where the government is. Even the local initiatives have this.

Change, for example to a sustainable society, requires a close collaboration at all levels. At micro level, in the street, the villages and towns, concrete activities are being developed and implemented. Through changing knowledge and technology, this level is becoming increasingly important. At meso level, where governments, researchers and major institutions are active, this is becoming increasingly recognised. Consequently change is becoming anticipated earlier and that demands new roles. Thus, the government increasingly becomes the facilitator and mediator, the local initiative, the innovator and responsible implementer.



Explanation by Geels

Multi-level Perspective Geels presents the interplay between regime, niche and landscape concepts as a multi-level perspective depicting technological transitions. The model is heuristic rather than ontological, and is an aid to better understand the process.

Ongoing processes at the regime and landscape level present 'windows of opportunity' for new technologies to exploit and become established. These breakthroughs tend to occur gradually through niche-accumulation. As innovations are used in multiple applications they build until achieving a critical mass. The model proposed by Geels shows how the success of a new technology requires developments across all levels to support the processes occurring within the niche (figure 1). Such an alignment is the basis of a regime shift.

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December 2014

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