Sustainability: a dynamic multi-level systems perspective

An alternative to institutional theory

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“More than ever the world needs effective global leaders and stronger education systems that prepare [them]…” Klaus Schwab
Current Situation?

- Business seen as creating social and environmental problems
- Government and NGOs create and control a tight regulatory framework
- Management challenged to comply and keep unwanted, negative impacts under control
- Over-estimation of political systems, regulations and NGOs
- Under-estimates and distorts the role of business in society and sustainability at large

Inspired by: Schaltegger and Wagner, 2011
Cars, computers and internet

With their innovations, sustainable entrepreneurs and sustainability managers, are shaping markets and society substantially
Sustainable Development in a Market system

Requires:

1. Sustainability innovations
2. Entrepreneurs who can achieve goals and success in mainstream markets

Market innovations do not occur by chance...at least not very often
Inertia

Institutional theory vs neo-institutional theory
A dynamic multi-level perspective on system innovation

Source: (Geels, 2005)

Landscape developments put pressure on regime, which opens up on multiple dimensions, creating windows of opportunity for novelties.

New ST-regime influences landscape.

ST-regime is ‘dynamically stable’. On different dimensions there are ongoing processes.

New configuration breaks through, taking advantage of ‘windows of’ opportunity’. Adjustments occur in ST-regime.

Elements are gradually linked together, and stabilise into a new ST-configuration which is not (yet) dominant. Internal momentum increases.

Articulation processes with novelties on multiple dimensions (e.g. Technology, user preferences, policies). Via co-construction different elements are gradually linked together.

Time
The Challenge

To redesign a more sustainable complete socio-technical system when no one actor is in control of the system.

No single, heroic entrepreneur!
The next sustainable innovation?
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