

Exnovation, a useful transitions governance concept? Insights from the Brussels Capital Region



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challenges of exnovation

La gouvernance de la transition vers une économie durable: les défis de l'exnovation

Le Projet 'GOSETE': une recherche bruxelloise pionnière sur l'exnovation dans une perspective de gouvernance métropolitaine [2020-2022]



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- 2. Exnovation as an umbrella concept**
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1. Our project Governance of the Sustainable Economy Transition: Challenges of Exnovation (GOSETE), 2020-2022

Focus

- Transitions in-the-making, 'governance of the future'
- Metropolitan/regional perspective

3 research areas

- Transitions governance research
- Sustainability assessment
- Legal studies



LEZ-combustion engines phase-out



E-commerce/traditional retail



Circular/linear economy

Research question

On which basis does the concept of exnovation make it possible to renew transitions governance thinking? What are the stakes at the metropolitan/regional level and for **Brussels** in particular?

2. Exnovation as an umbrella concept

- **Pioneer work in Transitions Research**

On regime destabilization (Turnheim & Geels 2012)

On governance of the discontinuation of socio-technical systems (Stegmaier et al. 2014)

- **An attempt to elaborate an umbrella definition**

Exnovation refers to processes of destabilization, decline and phase-out of industries, technologies, business models and practices that are carbon-intensive and/or raise other systemic sustainability problems

➔ “An umbrella concept for a much deeper scientific discourse on dynamics, challenges and (successful) governance approaches in such processes.” Heyen et al. 2017

3. Exnovation: the context of the emergence of the concept

‘Staying with the trouble’

- Ecological crises (global warming, biodiversity loss, nitrogen pollution...)
- Major uncertainties regarding the effective achievement of negotiated climate targets
- ‘Just Transitions’ and the rise of the ‘Gilets Jaunes’

❖ The limits of ‘niche cultivation’ strategies

➔ Such a context calls for rethinking transitions governance principles

4. Some important distinctions

‘Creative destruction’ vs. ‘purposefully managed’ exnovation

- Exemplar cases in the literature related to energy systems (including the German *Energiewende*)
- In Brussels: contrasted situation in key areas of competence of the Region
 - ‘Purposefully managed’ exnovation in the transport/mobility domain (implementation of a LEZ, debates on a combustion engines phase-out)
 - Market-driven decline in the retail sector (‘side-effects’ of the e-commerce development) and reconfiguration
 - ‘Weakening configurations’ of linear business models ?

Exnovation of what ? Beyond the focus on socio-technical systems...

5. Conclusions – key messages

- Exnovation forms part of a cluster of concepts (destabilisation, decline, discontinuity, phase-out, abandonment, dismanteling, etc.) It seems particularly pertinent to transitions governance and politics but at the same time it can work as an umbrella concept.
- There are different developments that contribute to its recent salience in transitions research (including the awareness of the limits of 'niche cultivation strategies' for advanced/deeper transitions)
- There are different distinctions to be made (including the one between 'creative destruction' vs. 'purposefully managed' exnovation)
- There are different cases to explore beyond the well-known paradigmatic ones (in energy systems or those clearly anchored in socio-technical systems)
- Application in urban and regional context brings along operationalization challenges (and there's a paper on it in progress)



“Exnovation: a useful transitions governance concept for the Brussels Region”, Paper in progress to be submitted to *Brussels Studies*

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Thank you for your attention !

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