

MAKING RESEARCH MATTER: From theory to praxis



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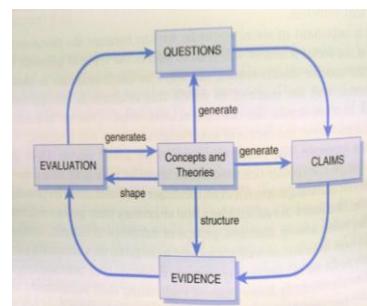


Outline

- Why should theory inform policy (in theory)?
- Is there a "science policy" gap? Are we producing "usable" knowledge?
- From theory to praxis:
 - What can we learn from "transdisciplinary" research approaches (at the latter stage of your research)?
 - How does engaging in real-world problems affect our positionality?
- I will share some examples of research and what I have learned.

How can (and why should) theory inform policy

- In academic and policy writing, to put forward an argument is to propose an explanation using an idea/ concept and to back this up with evidence
- Concepts:
 - Concepts only exist as an idea
 - Your concept links you to an academic field and a debate within it
 - We choose concepts depending on what we see as important
- Policy is not value free – it is informed by theory (for example neoliberal economics vs Keynesian economics)



Standard model: Theories and
concepts lie at the heart of research

Need to be reflexive in conceptual framework

- Proposed construction of Ka Lone Htar dam connected to Dawei Special Economic zone
 - Zaw Aung worked with young community researchers for village data collection
 - Produced a short descriptive report in Burmese with community documenting existing community resources
- For academic paper, we started with "enclosure of commons," "commodification of water," and "social movement theory," but finished with "accumulation by dispossession"
 - Field research revealed the historical (partial) integration of the community with the market



Zaw Aung and Middleton, C. (2016) "Chapter 7: Social Movement Resistance to Accumulation by Dispossession in Myanmar: A Case Study of the Ka Lone Htar Dam near the Dawei Special Economic Zone" (pp 181-210) in Blake, D. and Robins, L. (eds.) Water Governance Dynamics in the Mekong Region Strategic Information & Research Development Centre: Petaling Jaya

Addressing the “science-policy” gap?

- So... we have a concept/ explanation, but can it influence policy?
- Experts lament my research is not adequately considered in policy making... “We” need to “**bridge the science-policy gap**” (Smagjl and Ward, 2013)
- Differentiate between mode 1 research production (fundamental) and mode 2 research production (real world problems) (Gibbons et al, 1994)
- Early approaches for research to have an impact were:
 - “trickle down”
 - “transfer and translate”
 - (Means of communication has revolutionized with the internet and social media)

Transfer and translate is still common ...

- The evolving politics of water scarcity, urban water governance and (de)centralization in Hakha Town, Chin State
 - Based on MA thesis, then follow up research visit
 - Conceptual approach is political ecology
 - Argument that water security not just technical, or even about governance, but also addressing historical injustices
 - Sought to engage with urban water governance via:
 - Report; Policy briefs in Chin and English
 - Academic conference in Mandalay and Hakha (in 2018); Public forum (in BKK)!
 - Opinion piece in Chin in Hakha Times
 - “Comms” work (including social media)

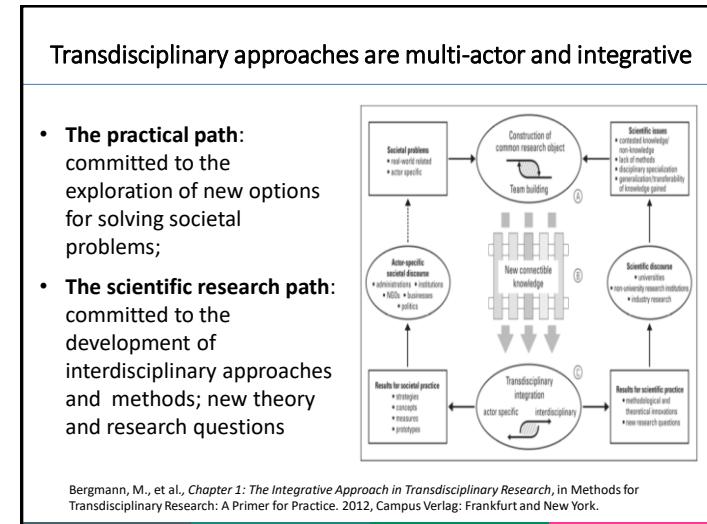
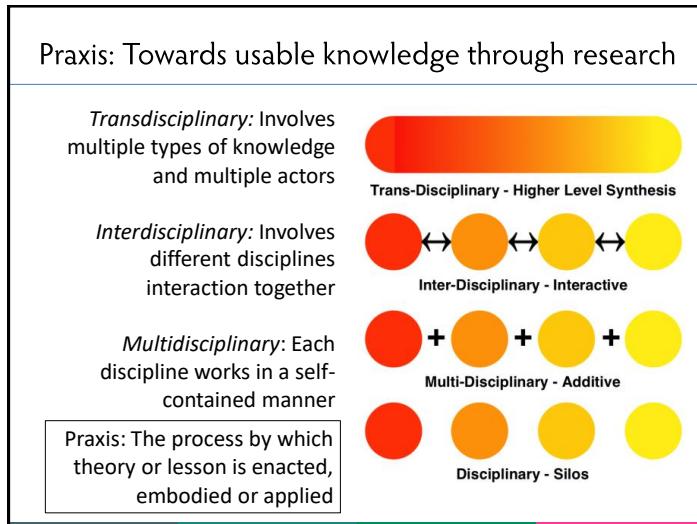


There are many types of knowledge

- Under what conditions is knowledge “usable”? How is it different from data?
- Whose knowledge is useable (.... and whose is not)?
- What is “knowledge”: A justifiable belief (van Kerkhoff and Lebel, 2006)
 - **“Scientific knowledge”**: Justifiable according to the standard set by adherence to accepted scientific practice and peer review
 - **“Local knowledge”**: justifiable according to claims of connection with a particular place.
 - **“Practical knowledge”**: justifiable on the basis of experience in practice
 - **“Political knowledge”**: justifiable according to experience within the political process.

Is the “science-policy” gap really a gap?

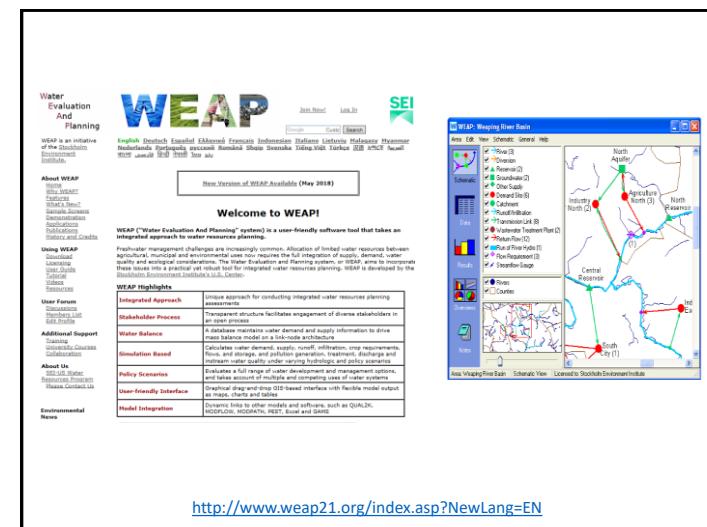
“This [“gap”] metaphor is problematic because it **implies a void waiting to be filled rather than a need to understand the coproduction landscape** as a space already populated with formal and informal rules, practices, and capacities. An alternative perspective ... is that **science and policy can be coproduced where the boundaries between these groups are blurred.**” van Kerkhoff and Lebel (2015:13)



Transdisciplinary approaches are multi-actor and integrative

„The world has problems, but the universities have departments“
(Brewer 1999)

- Shared understanding of research problem between actors
- Shared definition of research question and design
- Integrative research strategies
 - Integrated theoretical frameworks: Boundary concepts, such as vulnerability; resilience; sustainability...
 - Integration of the social and natural sciences: Challenging; for example risk as *perception* versus *statistical definition*
 - Model building: For example, integrated water use models etc...
- Provisional results are checked by all Entails "deep" participation



<http://www.weap21.org/index.asp?NewLang=EN>

Transdisciplinarity: What can go wrong?

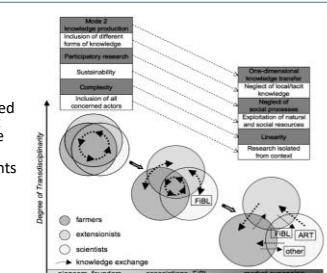
- Warin Chamrap community, Ubon Ratchathani town regularly experiences flooding
- Flooding is getting worse for some, due to changing land use changes
- Our initial assumptions:
 - Political ecologies of flooding
 - Potentials for green infrastructure
 - Modeling
- We organized initial meetings in Jan 2018, attempting TR from the beginning
 - Community leaders
 - Local government
 - Royal Irrigation Department (RID)
- Our project missed the application deadline ... but we learned of the need for a new way of thinking about modeling and water resource management




(Uninternational) transdisciplinarity

Aeberhard and Rist (2009)

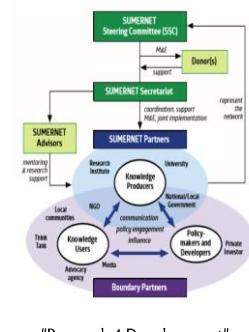
- Studied transdisciplinary co-production of knowledge in the development of organic farming in Switzerland
- 1920s to the early 1970s:
 - Niche “biodynamic farming” movement to address decreasing soil and food quality; tied to a philosophy of “Anthroposophy”; most innovation and research emerging from the farm
 - Close link between farmers, extension agents and researchers, who shared lectures (by farmers), a newsletter and an association
- Since 1970s
 - Increased professionalization and institutionalization of research; FBL was established through private means as govt was not interested.
 - Independent “certification” established (BIO SUISSE)
 - Growing recognition of “organic” farming by civil society and public sector
 - Growing markets for organic food since 1990s; farming increasingly for economic reasons



Aeberhard, A. and S. Rist, *Transdisciplinary co-production of knowledge in the development of organic agriculture in Switzerland*. Ecological Economics, 2009. 68: p. 1171-1181.

From theory to praxis: Learning from transdisciplinary approaches

- Engage with core actors through the whole process
 - In problem definition
 - Is there a demand for your research?
 - In confirming your findings
 - In sharing your research outcomes
 - Build legitimacy and trust across actors
- Beyond “fire and forget” communication
 - Build your own capacity to engage
 - Engage with your organization
 - Engage in policy meetings, consultations and forums, media (debates), including blogs
 - Build the capacity of others to engage (“co-productive capacity”)



“Research 4 Development”

Reflections on positionality and reflexivity

- Research is not neutral. Embedded within it are various values, histories... and our own positionality
 - From our disciplines
 - Within our networks
 - From our own personal background (education; gender ...)
- Reflexivity in research:
 - How we categorize (culture, gender, class etc...)
 - How we represent ourselves/ perform in our research
- If we engage in a “real world problems”, how does that affect (or render visible) our positionality?

Recovering and valuing wetland agro-ecological systems and local knowledge for water security and community resilience in the Mekong region" (RECOVER)

- Collaboration with Dr. Kanokwan Manorom, Ubon Ratchathani University
- Changing state-civil society relations towards the Rasi Salai Dam
 - 1990s: Opposition
 - Late 2000s: PSIA
- Academic concept: "Coproduction of ecological knowledge and ecological governance"
- Research method: Knowledge coproduction amongst multiple actors from 2015 to 2017
- Shared problem definition: Wetlands have become degraded and need protection
 - Research started through collaboratively mapping wetland resources and use
 - Built unprecedented trust and social learning
- Action on educational tourism could proceed, but wetland zoning would require more time



www.csds-chula.org/recover/

Summary

- Academic knowledge *alone* is not enough to achieve sustainable development multiple forms of knowledge and multiple actors are involved
- The earlier in the research process we work together, the better; process is everything to build trust, legitimacy, networks, and a shared understanding of the problem and the research
- Engaging in *real world problems* for a researcher means maintaining academic research principles (furthering knowledge and theory) whilst simultaneously working with others ...
(maintaining a critical engagement ... both ways)

Thank you for your attention

I'm looking forward to our discussion

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