

## **Foreword by Carlota Perez**

*Published in John Grin, Jan Rotmans, and Johan Schot (in collaboration with Frank Geels and Derk Loorbach), Transitions to Sustainable Development. New Directions in the Study of Long Term Transformative Change*

To understand transitions and know how to influence them is imperative in today's turbulent times of profound and wide-ranging changes. While we are learning to live in an information intensive society, we are moving from the national to the global space and from a cold war world to one speckled with "new wars". The financial meltdown of 2008 has questioned the free market certainties of the last few decades and has brought back to the fore the need for an active role of the State. Civil society is finding innumerable ways of organizing and communicating that go far beyond the traditional political parties and increase the able participants in collective decision-making. Globalization itself is also widening the decision stage eventually requiring the setting up of supra-national bodies. In the midst of these profound changes the environmental constraints that were the concern of some groups in society have now become the mainstream. Sustainability is already understood as a goal that must accompany all these transformations. We are thus in a major transition to a world with different values, a transition that cannot wait for spontaneous change to happen, but that must somehow be socially and collectively guided with a sense of urgency.

The hard sciences and engineering are intensely facing the task of developing alternative energies, methods for carbon capture, recycling and other technical ways of facing the environmental challenges; the social sciences must confront the task of understanding transitions and how to influence them. That is what the Dutch Knowledge Network on Systems Innovation and Transition (KSI) Project set out to do and what they present in this book is, in my judgment, a major contribution to this end. Besides being opportune, it is academically courageous, profoundly honest and directly policy relevant.

It is academically courageous because the authors fully recognize the difficulty of the task and do not pretend to have the final answer or model or methodology; neither do they allow disciplinary boundaries to constrain their exploration of the problem. As true scientists, the authors let their work be guided by all the complexity of the problems to study, not by the artificial frontiers erected by the needs of the academic world. The results presented in this book are not only interdisciplinary, they are inter-interdisciplinary. They bring together the relevant theories and enrich them individually and in their inter-relations. This reality-bound approach also led them to do case study work and action research. By participating in transition processes directly they deepened their comprehension of the difficulties involved in transitions and in their management. The infinitely rich

understanding that emerges combines knowledge from history, sociology, evolutionary economics, complex systems theory, governance theories and experimental findings. They not only produce new theoretical insights but they also open vast new areas for further research and experimentation.

It is a profoundly honest research effort because it makes no attempt at self-complacent unanimity. In recognizing the complexity of the task, the KSI project dared to put together three groups of top scholars from different schools of thought to collaborate in the challenge. With profound respect for each other's work and that of all their predecessors, they confront the questions from different angles, identify the similarities and differences and arrive at a pluralistic understanding which is more powerful and all embracing for being open. It offers no recipes, no final answers and it can welcome new perspectives. The current text can be seen as a temporary halt on the way in order to take stock of what has been learned, connect with the user world, receive its feedback and continue the exploration.

The book is policy relevant precisely because it is rooted in case studies –from history and from the present– and in the direct observation of the processes involved. The questions they set out to answer are, on the one hand, the nature of transitions and, on the other, the possibilities of influencing their course. And these two questions are strongly intertwined in the sense that the second does not just follow the first but actually influences the way the first is analyzed. The KSI team is committed to the usefulness of their research and are deeply conscious of the potential application of their work. While being theoretically rigorous, they were constantly aware of the practical implications of what they produced.

I am convinced that the findings that the authors present in this book are capable of having a profound impact in the many actors involved in the current transitions. Their pluralistic understanding of the complex matter at hand and their wealth of insights and methods of analysis will provide a stimulating space for social scientists, policy makers and the multiple groups of civil society to engage in further research and practical experimentation. It is a pioneering effort in a crucially important area and a brilliant example of the necessary link between academia and society.

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