Research with CSOs for sustainable development: Reflecting on experience

Report of a workshop held on 29 September 2010 in London

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Outline

Workshop aims:

- To compare participants' experiences of doing research – with (or as) Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) – relevant to sustainable development.
- To evaluate strengths and weaknesses of those experiences, as a basis to draw lessons for future efforts.
- To clarify how such cooperation benefits research and the wider society.
- To analyse how such research helps to open up issues of sustainable development to civil society perspectives.
- To bring together material for publication in a journal special issue, http://arj.sagepub.com

Attendance & Presentations

The workshop was hosted by the FP7 project, Cooperative Research on Environmental Problems in Europe (CREPE). It was designed to share experiences of research with CSOs, especially in projects funded by the Science in Society (SiS) Programme of the European Commission, as a basis to learn from such practices and improve them.

16 participants attended from eight European countries (plus Canada). Approximately half the participants were partners in six research projects involving CSOs. Other participants were involved (or seeking involvement) in analogous initiatives.

Pre-circulated papers, as well as the PPt files of presentations there, can be downloaded from the CREPE project website, http://crepeweb.net/?page_id=383

Introduction: Research with/as CSOs

Since 2007 the Science in Society (SiS) programme has funded projects which build the capacity of CSOs to participate in research, and subsequently funded projects in which they carry out research, under the title 'cooperative research'. The concept in turn can help to analyse practices and relationships within such a project (e.g. Karner et al., 2008).

‘Cooperative Research’ refers back to a 2006 workshop whose report elaborated the concept. There it meant: ‘constant attention to transdisciplinary engagement with stakeholders and public constituencies in order to explore the driving aims and purposes, the alternative orientations, and the wider social and environmental implications of research and innovation’. Such research should incorporate many different kinds of knowledge – formal and informal, codified and tacit, expert and lay, etc. This approach values tensions and challenges involved in bringing together diverse knowledges, as well as the potential for integration (Stirling, 2006).

Evaluating such experiences, a 2008 workshop noted the following:

- CSOs seek more active engagement to define research questions, rather than just being recipients of research results.
- Joint projects between CSOs and Research Organisations require investment from both sides in order to understand each other’s context, jargon and culture.
- Co-operative research encourages partnerships between researchers and non-researchers on issues of common interest. These processes entail mutual learning (DG Research, 2009).

Although those categories imply fixed roles, the distinction between researcher and non-researcher can be fluid. CSOs often carry out research, even if not formally recognised as such. They can become research organisations. Some have been validated as such by the European Commission and so qualify for the most favourable cost basis. For working with CSOs, academics may need to develop more diverse capacities and roles than in conventional research.

Cooperative Research: conceptual overlaps

Cooperative Research overlaps with other concepts – such as participatory research, partnership research and action research – which likewise describe collaborative processes between researchers and non-researchers. In particular:

Action Research is a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people. This process is meant to empower the participants being researched (Reason and Bradbury 2001; also Heron and Reason, 2002; Huxham and Vangen, 2005).

Partnership Research: By taking part in research, service users are meant to become empowered. But power relationships may be obscured by terms such as ‘community’ and ‘users’. These difficulties should be seen as dilemmas arising from ‘the political nature of the drive for greater service user involvement in research’ (Frankham, 2009).

Transdisciplinary research attempts to integrate different disciplines and involve broader stakeholders, thus including the knowledge of those who may have a stake in design and applications of the research. Expert knowledge is complemented by the knowledge and experience of potential users. Transdisciplinary research is meant to design research so that it encompasses the complexity of a problem and becomes more widely accountable. But wider involvement can mean conflicting criteria among stakeholders. Different stakeholders have divergent views about what is the problem at stake and how it should be solved (Maasen and Lieven, 2006).

The above initiatives may adopt other names – e.g. community-based research (Worthington, (2007), community-engaged research, etc. – where ‘community’ can denote a specific locality, practice or interest. See the networks listed on page 5.

Sustaining what development?

Nowadays most policies and innovations are promoted as ‘sustainable development’, a term which pervades government policy frameworks. But there are different accounts of what is to be sustained – e.g. current production and consumption patterns, economic growth, competitive advantage, livelihoods, ecosystem services, natural resources, communities, solidarity, etc. Each term can have diverse meanings. Tension between social, economic, and environmental sustainability is widely acknowledged, but each pillar has multiple interpretations, so the tension runs more deeply.

In such ways, sustainable development’ encompasses divergent accounts of progress, innovation and relevant knowledge, especially in the European context. In each account, current problems are

diagnosed in ways favouring a specific future Europe as desirable or necessary. Consequently, 'sustainable development' has become an ambiguous concept – even a contested one.[1]

[1] Based on the briefing document for a previous workshop: 'What Knowledge for Sustainable Agriculture? What Bio-Economy for Europe?', http://crepeweb.net/?page_id=355

Questions for discussion:

From the above issues, the following questions were posed.

- How does CSO involvement (re)frame issues and questions for research?
- What new relations arise between researchers and non-researchers?
- How do they engage in mutual learning?
- How do they jointly generate new knowledge?
- How does research become more accountable? E.g. by opening up issues of sustainable development to civil society perspectives?
- What dilemmas and difficulties arise?
- What can be learned for future efforts?

Issues discussed

The following issues arose at various stages in the talks and discussion.

Relationships between academic and CSO participants

There is much experience of academics working congenially with CSOs in a research context. This relationship depends on familiarity with each others' aims and cultures. Cultural differences can impede such familiarity and create misunderstandings, unless participants find means to avoid or overcome these barriers.

Cooperative relations can have many motivations. CSOs may seek academic partners to gain greater authority for research relevant to policy goals. Academics may seek access to CSOs' broader networks – to inform the research, as well as to gain greater influence for the results.

CSOs and academics have different rhythms of work. Research with CSOs must allow for interruptions due to other urgent activities (e.g. a new environmental regulation or a toxic spill). The arrangements also must be flexible in order to take advantage of favourable circumstances to adjust quickly the research agenda, beyond previous plans. In this sense cooperative research with CSOs is similar to collaborative research with a public administration – subject to changes of trajectory due to a change in government policy or official, or due to a crisis. By contrast, academic research generally develops and implements a longer-term plan.

CSOs as researchers: diverse roles

CSOs can play multiple roles in research – e.g. being consulted about research design, discussing results, initiating topics, or designing and even leading them. Within a project, tensions may arise between predictability versus flexibility of roles: CSOs may initially prefer to have clearly defined roles, especially if they are relatively new to research, but later they may seek and find ways to play more ambitious roles in the research activity. This flexibility would be ideally incorporated into a project structure and overall programme rules. Funds should facilitate the process and relationships, rather than institutionalize specific arrangements.

Tensions also may arise between CSOs' roles as researchers and as campaigners. They try to use research to gain information and authority for their perspective. But they may be seen as partisan or 'political' – rather than as researchers (as if research could be a-political).

Boundary spanners

Within CSOs, key individuals may have capacities to participate (or even to lead) within both advocacy and research activities. Such individuals can span those boundaries and so help to overcome misunderstandings or cultural barriers. Boundary-spanners can help clarify the issues at stake for (and to) participants in diverse contexts and constituencies. The latter can be understood as distinct 'communities of practice'. The boundary-spanner role need not lead to convergent aims or problem-definitions among participants; rather, their divergences should be accommodated in the research design.

Third sector (or third task) science

Beyond research carried out by private-sector and public-sector institutions, a 'third sector' also produces or stimulates new knowledge. This sector makes alliances with academics who take critical approaches to dominant paradigms. Third-sector research may have distinctive characteristics,

especially in framing problems to be solved. A related concept is 'third-task science', originally describing universities' relation to local industry – but potentially also their relation to CSOs.

Transdisciplinary approaches and policy relevance

For research with CSOs, academics face major obstacles in disciplinary rules, assumptions and boundaries. By contrast, transdisciplinary research approaches have provided ways to define societal problems; some transdisciplinary units have been recently created to promote such approaches. By taking up societal problems, transdisciplinary research creates space for critical reflection, gains potential impact through CSO networks and becomes more policy relevant.

But such relevance per se is neither novel nor specific to CSOs, especially in a context where academic research increasingly incorporates official policy framings as its own. Alternatively, research can question official policy frameworks and inform opposition to them, in ways congenial to some CSOs. Through such activities, academics may jeopardise their prospects for conventional careers. Likewise the Netherlands government may soon end its funding for CSOs: why finance persistent critics?

Knowledge democratisation

In EU policy language, European Research Area contributes to a Knowledge-Based Society. Sometimes civil society is seen as helping to democratise science or knowledge. However, such discussions and initiatives remain at the margins of the formal research system, which is largely driven by dominant economic interests. In this familiar sense, research has always been governed in some way, and new 'governance' discourses potentially continue earlier arrangements and power relations. As a challenge for CSOs and academics, together we can try to create or use spaces in the margins for critical perspectives, as a stronger basis to challenge the dominant agendas.

Sustainable development, sustainability or degrowth?

Recognising ambiguities and weaknesses in the term 'sustainable development', CSOs attempt to give the term their preferred meaning, e.g. by criticising dominant development pathways as unsustainable. Some CSOs criticise the concept 'sustainable development' as an oxymoron, on grounds that economic growth cannot be environmentally sustainable. For this reason, some abandon the concept altogether and instead advocate 'sustainability', while dissociating the term from economic growth. Some associate it with degrowth, explicitly or implicitly. These concepts matter for how research agendas diagnose societal problems and suggest possible solutions.

Innovation: social aspects

EU policy language has generally conflated societal progress, innovation and techno-scientific advance in particular (Felt, 2007). Now the EU is being rebranded as an 'Innovation Union', http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/index_en.cfm?pg=press
This is a Flagship Initiative of the Europe 2020 agenda, which emphasises greater efficiency as a remedy for many societal problems, especially via 'smart, sustainable and inclusive growth' (CEC 2010).

Innovation always has a social component, which is often hidden by a focus on technological advance and/or market imperatives as supposedly driving the future. As a policy framework, the 'Innovation Union' generally reinforces that perspective. Nevertheless the policy offers an opportunity for alternative perspectives to elaborate 'innovation' as social relations, negotiations, pathways and choices.

This new policy mentions 'social innovation', a concept which was elaborated at a workshop on 'Europe and Social Innovation', held on 19-20 January 2009, http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/policy_advisers/activities/conferences_workshops/socinnov_jan-2009_en.htm
The concept can be appropriated for critical meanings and perspectives – e.g. to clarify how innovation generally presumes a particular form of 'social', to identify a social negotiation of such forms, and to motivate research which opens up different social relations through innovation.

Acknowledgements

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Worthington, R. (2007) 'Community-based research and technoscience activism: A report on the Living Knowledge 3 Conference', *Science as Culture* 16(4): 475-480, http://www.loka.org/Documents/lk3review.pdf

Websites of relevant networks

Living Knowledge, http://www.scienceshops.org/
Loka Institute, http://www.loka.org/
Global Alliance on Community Engaged Research (GACER), http://communityresearchcanada.ca/

Appendix 1: Draft Programme

Workshop held on 29 September 2010 in London

Research with CSOs for sustainable development: Reflecting on experience

Note: Although Michel Pimbert and Steve Mackinson were unable to attend, their presentations are included on the website, http://crepeweb.net/?page_id=383

10.00 **Welcome and Introduction**: Les Levidow, Open University

10.20 ***Citizens, civil society and the innovation union***
Philippe Galiay, Science in Society (SiS) Programme, European Commission

10.45 ***Guest speaker***: Michel Pimbert, International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED)

11.10 ***Cooperative Processes for Research on Sustainable Development***
Sue Oreszczyn and Les Levidow, The Open University,
and Steve Hinchliffe, Exeter University
Coordinators of the SiS-funded project, Cooperative Research on Environmental Problems in Europe (CREPE)

11.50 ***Participatory research processes: Experiences from a NGO engaged in 'science and democracy'***
Claudia Neubauer, Fondation Sciences Citoyennes
Coordinator of the SiS-funded project, Science, Technology and Civil Society (STACS) and partner in CREPE

12.15 ***The co-production of knowledge about alternative agro-food networks: experiences of involving CSOs in 'co-operative research'***
Sandra Karner, Inter-University Research Centre on Technology, Work and Culture (IFZ), Graz. Nicoleta Chioncel, University of Oradea
Coordinators of the SiS-funded project, Facilitating Agro-food Networks (FAAN)

12.40 ***Engaging CSOs and other stakeholders in fisheries research***
Steve Mackinson, Centre for Environment, Fisheries & Aquaculture Science (CEFAS)
Coordinator of the SiS-funded project, Bridging the knowledge gap between fishermen and science (GAP1)

13.00 lunch

14.00 ***Science shops: research capacity for CSOs***
Henk Mulder, Science Shop, University of Groningen, The Netherlands
Coordinator of the SiS-funded project, Public Engagement with Research and Research Engagement with Society (PERARES) and Chairman of the Dutch Science Shops

14.25 ***Between science and activism: learning and teaching ecological economics with environmental justice organizations***
J. Martinez-Alier, H. Healy, L. Temper, M. Walter, B. Rodriguez-Labajos, J.F. Gerber, M. Conde ICTA, Universitat Autonoma de Barcelona
Coordinator of the SiS-funded project, Civil Society Engagement with ECological EConomics (CEECEC)

14.50 ***The ESDinds project: analysing participation in a complex, multi-level project involving cooperative research on values-based indicators***
Gemma Burford, Marie Harder, et al., Sustainable Development Coordination Unit, University of Brighton,
Coordinator of the SiS-funded project, Development of indicators and assessment tools for CSO value-based projects in education for sustainable development (ESDinds)

15.30 **General discussion**

Appendix 2: Abstracts

Cooperative Processes for Research on Sustainable Development

Sue Oreszczyn and Les Levidow
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Steve Hinchliffe, *University of Exeter*

ABSTRACT

Entitled 'Co-operative Research on Environmental Problems in Europe' (CREPE), our project brought together civil society organisations (CSOs) and academics as partners to carry out research together. The thematic focus was environmental issues of agricultural practices and innovations, in the EU policy context of a Knowledge-Based Bio-Economy. Within those overall themes, the project had two aims specifically about co-operative research:

To strengthen CSOs' capacity to participate in research, while engaging with diverse perspectives and expertise – thus facilitating co-operation between researchers and non-researchers, as well as between academics and CSOs.

To design and analyse the methods used for co-operative research, as a basis to inform future efforts.

As part of the overall CREPE project, a specific study aimed: 1) to facilitate self-reflection on the social process and methods of the project as co-operative research; 2) to identify and facilitate ways to enhance collaboratory-reflexive processes; and 3) to benefit other efforts at collaborative research. This study focused on the diverse relationships involved in research cooperation. The design promoted reflection on the issues faced by partners, especially through diaries. This enabled academic researchers and CSOs to make more explicit the existing relationships; making them more explicit helped participants to consider how best to utilise their potential.

As highly networked organisations, CSO partners see co-operative research as an opportunity to extend and strengthen their networks, especially through workshops. In this process, more participants were drawn into the issues which animate the CSO partners; they were able to strengthen existing networks, form new ones and foster their networks of practice. Mutual learning occurred both within individuals and at the group level, especially by creating spaces that enable learning. Engagement with the academics also helped CSOs to design research in a rigorous way, although not necessarily in the sense of conventional academic research.
All partners – academics and CSOs – were funded for their research activities. Furthermore, the overall project was jointly managed and run by all the partners. These joint stakes put partners on a more equal footing and strengthen CSOs' capacity to participate in research activities. All partners seek to inform CSO strategies, e.g. for intervening in policy issues, and so design their studies for that purpose.

As an overall project theme, agri-environmental issues provided a reference point for analysing divergent accounts of sustainable agriculture, within and across the case studies. For some topics, dominant policy agendas were proposing solutions which would more efficiently use natural resources to enhance sustainability. In our studies, these solutions were critically analysed as techno-fixes evading the fundamental sources of unsustainability. This critique linked those studies in our project-wide transversal analysis, which was circulated for discussion at our stakeholder workshop in Brussels.

Partners' diverse roles in research were not reducible to an ordinal scale of activity, proximity, involvement, etc. The diversity of practices has implications for any standard guidelines or assessment tools, which need to remain open to alternative ways of addressing issues as they arise during the research process. To accommodate CSOs, funding bodies and academic researchers need to have greater flexibility than would normally be the case.

Participatory research processes - experiences from a NGO engaged in 'science and democracy'

Claudia Neubauer, *Fondation Sciences Citoyennes*

ABSTRACT

The integration of diverse forms of knowledge in a research process is far from being evident. Programmes and projects of participatory research have taken years to respond to this challenge. From our and other NGO experiences, there are numerous questions we have to try to resolve, such as:

- How to build a situation of co-production of knowledge?
- In what situations of action and knowledge production is it necessary to engage in participatory research?
- At what stage of a program - construction of the research issue and the protocols, process of the project, valorisation of the results - the civil society partners are they actors, objects, evaluators and/or users of research?
- How important is the animation of a participatory process: what are the roles of researchers, NGOs, potential facilitators or mediators?
- How to integrate and recognise (or accept) « popular » knowledge on an equal footing with scientific knowledge?
- How to find a common language allowing to build bridges between these two types of knowledge while honouring their respective paradigms and protocols?
- What integration / what place do participatory projects have in public research institutions?

The co-production of knowledge about alternative agro-food networks: experiences of involving CSOs in 'co-operative research

Sandra Karner, *Inter-University Research Center on Technology, Work and Culture, Graz*
Nicoleta Chioncel, *University of Oradea*

ABSTRACT

An important aspect of 'co-operative research' refers to the topic of the production of new knowledge. Questions are raised about the way in which different kinds of knowledge - represented by the different actors participating in an actual ongoing research process - are both being treated and integrated.

Taking into account that the knowledge production process is relational and action-oriented – being formed and enacted in the interaction among different actors, we argue it makes sense to recognize that the framing of the research process may be closely related to the framing of the knowledge production and the associated process. We thus consider precisely how the research design has an important impact on the co-production of new knowledge.

Framing may be related to various stages of the research process, like defining the issues/problems at stake, formulating the research questions, the choice of methods, and the interpretation of data. All of these activities are shaped by the goals, values and presumptions underpinning the research process.

This perspective on framing the knowledge production process refers to the epistemological 'trans-disciplinary integration concept' (Klein 2004[2]) that we adapted as a conceptual framework for knowledge integration in the context of co-operative research. It emphasises the integration of various forms of knowledge, the production of a kind of hybrid knowledge resulting from the co-operation of actors from different backgrounds.

The paper reflects on how knowledge integration can take place within a co-operative research activity. We show how this can be taken into account in the research process design - in particular concerning communicative action in the context of information exchange, negotiations and decision making processes. We found that in practice three key aspects influence the integration:

1) making differences explicit
2) generation of a common ground
3) shared frame of reference

Concerning the structure of the general process, we focus on the role of differentiation and reflection as a basis for integration.

The experiences presented in this paper have been gained through an experimental project called 'FAAN – Facilitating Alternative Agro-Food Networks: a Stakeholders' Perspective on Research Needs'. FAAN implemented co-operative research as a transdisciplinary process engaging five civil society organisations and five academic institutes from five European countries. The project's aim was to identify policies and other factors influencing the development of alternative agro-food initiatives, and to test and evaluate a co-operative research process.

This paper offers an interpretative analysis of diverse material collected *in situ* over the course of reflexive project steering, combined with retrospective in-depth extended interviews with FAAN-team members.

[2] Klein, J. T. (2004) Prospects for transdisciplinarity, *Futures* 36: 515–526.

Engaging CSOs and other Stakeholders in Fisheries Research

Steve Mackinson, *Centre for Environment, Fisheries & Aquaculture Science (CEFAS)*

ABSTRACT

We discuss experiences of trying to enable deeper and more systematic engagement of stakeholders through European research activities on fisheries and the marine environment. With policies rapidly moving to a more integrated and participatory approach, the apparent urgency to engage CSOs and other stakeholders in meaningful ways is ever pressing.

Our experiences in cooperative planning of research actions reveal the complexity regarding the incentives to engage, some particular strategies and tactics that seemed to work well, and the real and perceived barriers from both sides. Unsurprisingly, the establishment of communications and cultures conducive to shared problem solving is high priority, as is the need to work towards a governance structure that helps links research with policy outcomes, while at the same time resonating directly with stakeholders. Moving forward to the implementation of cooperative research, issues of credibility, legitimacy and saliency will important in understand the dynamics of participation.

Science shops: research capacity for CSOs

Henk Mulder, *University of Groningen, The Netherlands*

ABSTRACT
Science Shops and similar entities provide independent, participatory research support in response to concerns expressed by civil society and its organisations. Science Shops cover all academic disciplines and many of their research topics concern sustainable development in the broadest sense. Many Science Shops are affiliated with a university, where students under staff supervision perform the research. Since this is usually part of the students curriculum there are no additional costs involved – the students get course credit and the professors supervise. Thus the service to CSOs is for free or at very low costs, which does mean that research that would otherwise not be performed now is done. Though it may take a while before a students is found and can start, students are less bound by time constraints than commercial consultants and they are still open minded about possible solutions. Staff supervision guarantees scientific quality. The process guidance by Science Shop staff guarantees that the context of the problem remains in view and results will serve the CSO.

Through Science Shops, CSOs have access to research capacity. They are involved in formulating the exact research question (so it is a very "upstream" influence), and their contextual knowledge is a rich source of information for the researchers. In many cases, the CSOs are not doing parts of the research themselves, since they favour an "independent" research – and also from the university's point of view, research should be independent, which also means that sometimes results are quite different from a CSO expected. The CSOs are part of the project's advisory committee though. A plan for disseminating the research outcome and follow-up is jointly made (e.g. seminars are organised). For CSOs, it means that their voice is heard in discussions and they can substantiate their claims with research results. Other types of research, like evaluations of services they render, makes that they as well are able to benefit from scientific studies for their own goals. Thus, they are in a more equitable position with industry and government, who can traditionally afford to hire researchers and buy knowledge. From single projects, steady relations between CSOs and science shops can grow, thus allowing a more programmatic approach. Science Shops thus empower CSOs. The research will give them media-attention, legal success, policy-influence – or will improve their own knowledge base or ways of working (depending on the type of question asked).

An example to clarify this: The Foundation for protection of the Rhine (Reinwater) approached the Science Shop Utrecht. Their question: The fish population in the Rhine is being restored, the water is clean again. But, now there are hydro power plants, in which many fish die (up to 25% of certain

species). What can one do about that? A student investigated various technological options, and specified which species were best protected by which technology. She optimised this to protect the most threatened species and suggested a good hybrid technology. Reinwater lobbied the Dutch government with this; the government then decided that hydro plants should have a good fish protection system in place or they would lose their accreditation of "green energy source", which would result in losing all their tax benefits. A big impetus to implement the fish protection systems, and a big success for Reinwater. And the student had a great MSc subject.

Science Shops emerged in The Netherlands in the 1970s. In 2010, there are many Science Shops, Community Knowledge Exchanges and Community University Research Alliances worldwide. The European Commission actively supports them; most recently in the PERARES project (Public Engagement with Research and Research Engagement with Society), which received a 2.7 million Euro grant for 2010-2014. In PERARES, 26 partners from 17 countries work on the objective to strengthen interaction in formulating research agendas between researchers and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), at the level of research organisations, and at regional and transnational/European levels.

In this talk the process of mediating research through science shops and its impacts will be presented and discussed. Your input and comments on PERARES will be valued as well.

Between science and activism:
Learning and teaching ecological economics with environmental justice organizations

J. Martinez-Alier, H. Healy, L. Temper, M. Walter, B. Rodriguez-Labajos, J.F. Gerber, M. Conde
ICTA, *Universitat Autonoma de Barcelona*

ABSTRACT

Environmental justice organizations (EJOs) and their networks have accumulated large stocks of activist knowledge in the field of ecological economics which sometimes becomes available to academics and is influential in public policies. Vice-versa, some concepts and methodologies developed in ecological economics are useful in practice to EJOs. This was the theoretical point of departure for the European
FP7 Science-in-Society collaborative research projects CEECEC
(2008-10) and EJOLT (2011-14) based on previous contacts between academics and EJOs that sometimes go back twenty years.

We explain the origins and contents of CEECEC (Civil Society Engagement with Ecological Economics) and EJOLT (Environmental Justice Organizations, Liabilities and Trade), giving examples of activist-led science and of science-led activism in the field of ecological economics and also in political ecology. CEECEC (2008-10) brought together 8 civil society organizations and 6 university institutes. It was focused on learning and teaching ecological economics with environmental activists (www.ceecec.net). It has produced a Handbook and glossary, and an on-line course on "Ecological Economics from the bottom up". EJOLT (2011-14) combines the academic and/or activist knowledge of 23 organizations in 20 different countries, North and South, to produce and map statistics of resource extraction and waste disposal conflicts, using activist knowledge, with the aim to answer two main questions: Which are the causes of the increasing number and intensity of ecological distribution conflicts at different scales?
How to turn such conflicts into forces for environmental sustainability?

Key words: activist knowledge, activist-led science, science-led activism, ecological debt, ecologically unequal trade, environmental liabilities, post-normal science, GDP of the Poor, economic degrowth, political ecology, CEECEC, EJOLT.

The ESDinds project: analysing participation in a complex, multi level project involving cooperative research on values-based indicators

Gemma Burford, Marie Harder, et al., *Sustainable Development Coordination Unit, University of Brighton,*

ABSTRACT

ESDinds is a two-year collaborative research project to develop indicators and tools to assist Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to measure values-based aspects and impacts of their work. The research process is co-designed and co-implemented by a consortium of four CSOs and two university research groups. Initial stages focused on learning about values and outcomes that the CSO partners associated with `successful' projects; more recently, indicators and assessment tools have been developed in an iterative way, through collaborative case study research within CSO partner projects. In this paper, we examine a specific case study of a field visit by ESDinds researchers to a youth project in Sierra Leone, assessing community participation both qualitatively and quantitatively at different stages of the project.

We observe that some key individuals (such as senior project staff) adopted the role of `community representative' in some contexts and that of 'expert' in others, such that any attempt to locate the research project on a continuum from 'expert-driven' to 'community-controlled' must, of necessity, be undertaken at the level of relationships. In the ESDinds project, the relationship of participation that was established between academic researchers and senior CSO staff was observed to be very different from the relationship that the same CSO leaders were able to establish with the youth beneficiaries of their project, given the time limitations and other logistical considerations.