





“

We're going to move to the new paradigm like the other Phoenix. It's like a metamorphosis... We are moving and we are in the middle. I mean I'm quite sure that this is going to be the future for learning and the future for research. [iB2]

”



# 'Unmaking the university'

Theory of Change to design radical  
educational futures

*Gemma O'Sullivan*



## The concept of ‘unmaking’

a diverse range of interconnected and multilevel (individual, social, socioecological) processes that are deliberately activated in order to ‘make space’ (temporally, spatially, materially, and/or symbolically) for radical alternatives that are incompatible with dominant modern capitalist configurations

Feola, G., Vincent, O. Moore, D. (2021). (Un)making in sustainability transformation beyond capitalism. *Global Environmental Change*, Vol. 69, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2021.102290>.

Feola, G. (2019). Degrowth and the Unmaking of Capitalism: Beyond ‘Decolonization of the Imaginary’?. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, 18(4), 977–997. Retrieved from <https://acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/article/view/1790>



## Transformation via **addition** vs **subtraction** (or: construction vs deconstruction)

### By addition

- Innovation (social, technical, cultural)
- Prefiguration

### Mechanisms

- Competition
- Windows of opportunity

### By subtraction

- Decolonisation (of the imaginary)
- Disruption
- Exodus (autonomy)

### Mechanisms

- 'Making space'
- 'Breaking out'

Feola, G., Vincent, O. Moore, D. (2021). (Un)making in sustainability transformation beyond capitalism. *Global Environmental Change*, Vol. 69, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2021.102290>.

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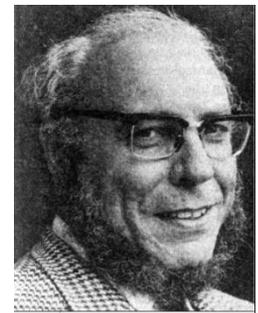


## ***Making space; collective narrative (identity formation); reimagining time; actors x spaces that facilitate prefiguration; competency development***

O'Sullivan, G. (2023). *Shaping transdisciplinary, challenge-based education using knowledge creating teams from five European universities: A realist evaluation* University of Dublin Trinity College]. Dublin, Ireland.

“ Although disciplinarity is important... this is about effectiveness. Maybe I don't use this word effectiveness but otherwise it's just an intellectual exercise. We need to add to this intellectual exercise an interest and motivation that translates into engagement and excitement and active thinking. [iH2] ”

“ You put some scientific people around the table. You have a lovely discourse. You write a paper apart from that. And that's all. And then you say goodbye. Well, it's a university sport. [iE1] ”



h (1929 - 1980)

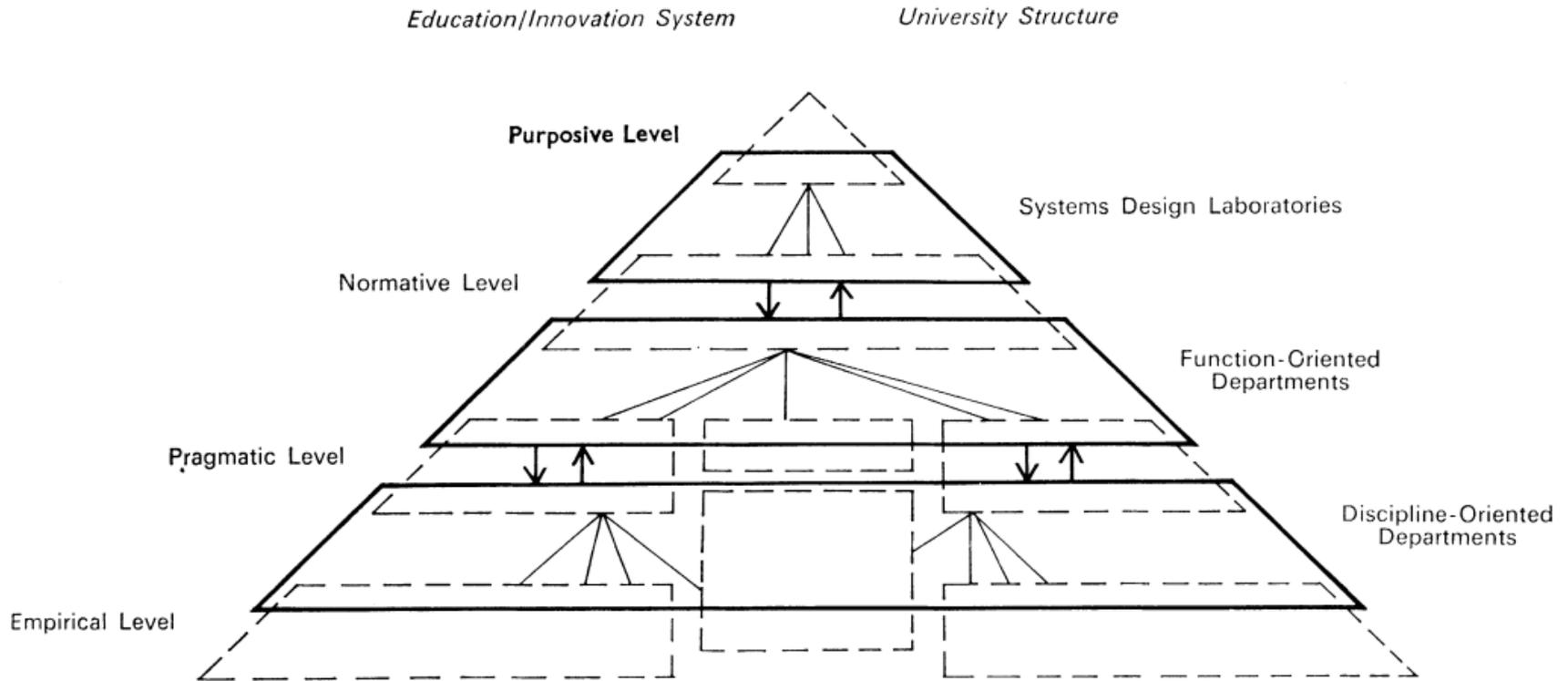


Fig. 3. Transdisciplinary university structure. The three types of structural units — focus on the interdisciplinary links between the four levels of the education/innovation system - - -.



# Transdisciplinarity

Jantsch  
1970s

Social purpose

Gibbons et al.  
1990s

Piaget  
1970s

Superior stage

Nicolescu  
1980s

European tradition  
Pohl, Hirsch-Hadorn et al.  
2000s

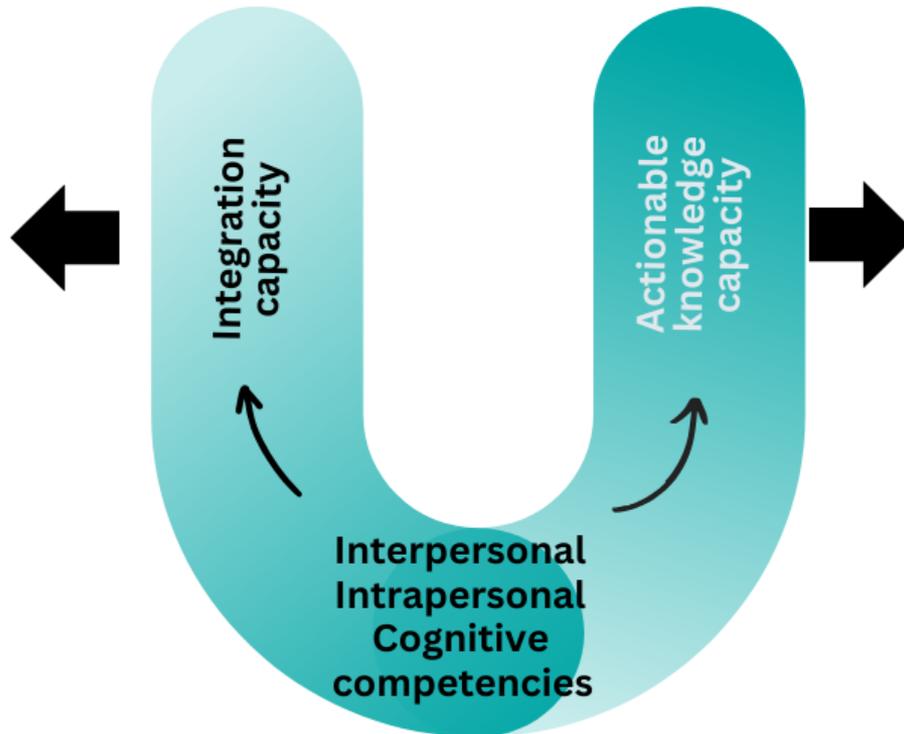
Dr. Gemma O'Sullivan



## Transdisciplinarity as U-shaped learning

Interacting in a defined problem-solving process, students/researchers, academic and extra-academic actors learn as a group to develop or enhance competencies to integrate knowledge and bridge the knowledge-action gap (Gibbs, 2017; Klein, 2018; Fam et al., 2018; O'Sullivan, 2023).

- Co-produce and integrate knowledge;
- Show how knowledge from multiple disciplines must be brought to bear in order to solve a problem;
- Frame complex problems using diverse perspectives;
- Jointly formulate problems with extra-academic actors.



- Implement and assess societal and scientific outcomes;
- Develop solutions for real-world problems;
- Apply concepts in the real world.

This term is proposed based on a literature review of transdisciplinary curricula design in higher education 1970-2022 (O'Sullivan, G., 2023)\*



Dr Joost Vervoort – Imagination infrastructures



Professor Karin Rebel, Director of Education, Chair in Sustainability Science & Education

Two interdisciplinary Bachelor's and five specialised Master's programmes; several sustainability minor programmes (in Dutch). Approx. 1800 students

# to help accelerate the transition to a sustainable society

Special Interest Group on Justice, Power and Transformative Action in Sustainability (JUPITA)



Professor Flor Avelino

Looking back at the Mixed Classroom on just transitions  
Turning the classroom into a social movement?



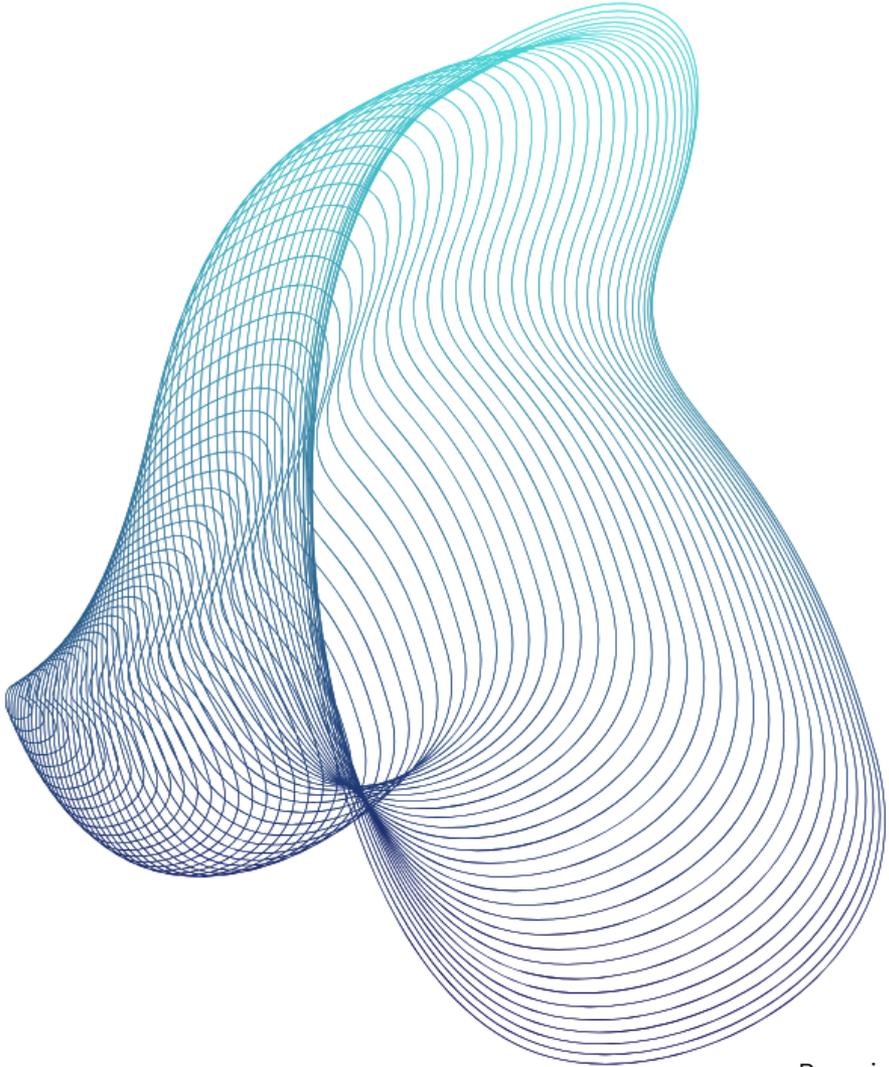
Professor Maarten Hajer – Urban Futures Studio

## Copernicus:

- transformative education;
- new ways of thinking and doing;
- change agents of the future;
- partner with actors and stakeholders to produce rigorous knowledge;
- transdisciplinary research and education



Dr Giuseppe Feola – Unmaking, a research programme on the disruption of capitalism in societal transformation to sustainability



# Research Question

## Seeds of Change

Enhancing inter- and transdisciplinary  
education

Copernicus Institute of Sustainable  
Development 2024

Perceived as a new paradigm that can systematise sustainability education: develops key competencies to work in and contribute to the field of sustainable development (Tejedor et al., 2018)



## Teaching change

learning spaces  
relationship building  
institutional change  
pedagogies  
content  
competencies  
skills  
educational mission  
educational research & experimentation

## Student change

skilled analysts  
skilled communicators  
develop creativity  
inspire  
own their own learning process  
critical thinking  
multiple perspectives  
intrapersonal  
relationship competencies  
(check unlearning)  
values  
change agent  
transdisciplinarity

## Societal change

co-learning  
relationship building  
multi-perspectivity  
dealing with complexity  
reflexive society  
capacity building  
inclusive collaborative, society  
evidence-informed society  
sustainability-oriented change  
hopefulness  
integrated solutions  
see people as integrated



## *... from transition to transformation*

### Four Pathways

1. Relationship Building
2. Integrating Multiple Perspectives
3. Empowering society with evidence
4. Empowered to act



### Enablers

Teacher change  
Teaching activity or method  
Curriculum change  
Institutional change

### Disablers

### Interventions

Affective, relational pedagogies, competencies



Universiteit Utrecht

# Thank you