

Abstract

Matthias Wanner - Annaliesa Hilger - Janina Westerkowski
Center for Transformation Research and Sustainability, Wuppertal

Real-World Laboratories: A Cyclic Concept of Transdisciplinary Intervention for Sustainability Transitions

A comprehensive understanding of components of and central processes in Real-World Laboratories

Real-World Laboratories (RWL) have attracted attention in the German political and scientific debate in recent years. This paper reflects on the latest comprehensive definitions of RWL and analyses similarities and differences to approaches like Transdisciplinary Processes, Urban Transition Labs, Participatory Action Research, Sustainable Living Labs or Intervention Research.

A previously missing genuine concept of a RWL-process is developed. Real-World Lab projects are fundamentally embedded in the context of sustainable development and this initial framing is conceived as a transparent intervention on its own. The approach furthermore emphasizes the idea of sustainability innovation through co-design in a transdisciplinary team, joint idea generation between science and practice and a real-world intervention within specific spatial or contentual boundary objects. Those interventions undergo an ongoing reflection cycle, might be calibrated and result in an increased theoretical and practical transformation knowledge for science and practice actors.

The theoretic concept and ideal flow-chart is applied to a current case study in a quarter in Wuppertal/Germany in order to reflect on its practical feasibility. Empirical and theoretical limitations and challenges of Real-World Labs are discussed.