

## Transformative Power of Prefigurative Social Movements - Analysing power dynamics in transformative social innovation in the POTRANSI project

Department: Copernicus Institute of Sustainable Development

Research group: Innovation Studies / POTRANSI-project

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Flor Avelino and Dr. Tessa de Geus

Email address: [f.r.avelino@uu.nl](mailto:f.r.avelino@uu.nl); [t.degeus@uu.nl](mailto:t.degeus@uu.nl)

### Project description

There is an urgent need to address the interconnected ecological, economic, and social challenges of our time. Social innovations have the potential to drive such societal change by acting out, or, ‘prefiguring’, ways of doing, thinking, and organising that they long to see in the future. Yet, as they diffuse, scale, or mainstream in an attempt to become transformative, they face a paradox: To what extent do they actually disrupt systems, or reproduce existing structures instead? In the POTRANSI project (<https://potransi.sites.uu.nl/>), we address this innovation paradox from a power perspective, asking: Who, or what exercises and undergoes power through social innovation? How do existing power relations change, and how might they be reproduced? What are unintended power implications? How can social innovations gain power while holding on to their transformative potential?

To answer these questions we develop a theoretical power framework by building on existing insights on power, as well as on empirical research across the Netherlands, Portugal and the UK in our [case studies](#) on participatory democracy, sharing economy, eco-communities and decentralised energy. In addition, we organise a [Transformative Power Arena](#) – an action research method to collaborate with entrepreneurs, activists, policymakers, and citizens involved in social innovation across Europe.

Using action research, we experiment with new methods to collaborate in transdisciplinary settings, for instance inspired by Theatre of the Oppressed. As such we aim to not just *talk* about power, but to also use other ways of expression to facilitate interaction. One of POTRANSI’s missions is to increase power literacy: to foster a critical and informed debate about the role of power in social innovation – placing it at the center of discussions on transformations, where it has often been overlooked.

The student assistant will be involved in the POTRANSI project by supporting in the following variety of activities: organizing team meetings, conducting literature reviews, preparing manuscripts and references, data-collection in mapping social innovation initiatives/networks, development of a community of practice and Transformative Power Arena, organising events and workshops, communicating about the project via email, MS Teams & social media, participating in Copernicus special interest group on Justice, Power and Transformative Action in Sustainability (JUPITA).

### Job requirements

We seek a curious and proactive student who has a strong affinity with and curiosity for the themes as researched in the POTRANSI-project. Other requirements include: availability to be physically present at Copernicus, particularly on Tuesday & Thursdays, experience with qualitative research (e.g. interviews, participant observation, document reviews), a professional attitude incl. reliability, a proactive mindset, integrity, precision, good communication skills and collegiality, willing to engage in and contribute to online community-building and communication through social media and digital dissemination and a curious and open-minded attitude.