



REPORT: WORKSHOP SCALING UP SUSTAINABLE INNOVATION: ACTORS, INSTITUTIONS AND GEOGRAPHIES

A new phase in the transition to a more sustainable society has arrived: some sustainable innovations are now scaling up. Researchers from Oxford University and the Copernicus Institute of Utrecht University discussed upscaling during a one-day workshop.

From electric vehicles to decentralized energy, new technologies and organizational forms are now diffusing in different institutional contexts around the globe. On the 23rd of May, researchers gathered to find answers to new questions that accompany the process of scaling up, questions such as: How can different technologies best be integrated with each other as they scale up? Can we accelerate diffusion and ensure innovation really contributes to sustainability?

The workshop was organized by Aoife Brophy Haney from the Smith School and Toon Meelen from the Copernicus Institute of Utrecht University, The Netherlands. The presenters were also from Oxford and Utrecht. They had backgrounds in organizational studies, sustainability transition studies, and geography.

The case studies presented looked at various sectors relevant for sustainability. Across all contexts, there were three main themes that emerged. First, there are many tensions that affect the process of scaling up sustainable innovations: tensions, for example, for entrepreneurs in the circular economy as they try to stay true to their ideals (Julian Kirchherr and Marvin Henry), for policymakers in India as they face the challenge of reaching scale with LED lighting and maintaining quality (Radhika Khosla), and tensions between platform owners and platform service providers in how they understand their roles (Koen Frenken). Second, a major challenge in all settings is to integrate different technologies (Debbie Hopkins, Aoife Brophy Haney), different practices (Bernhard Truffer), and different actors (Toon Meelen, Tim Schwanen) in new ways. This requires new thinking related to how these different components relate to each other, and may require new roles for companies involved in implementing new technologies and for users as active participants in the diffusion of innovations.



Third, throughout the course of the day we discussed what scaling up actually means. Tim Schwanen, for example, called for more attention to the repetition of small-scale experiments in different places, instead of seeing scaling up only as a process of fast and efficient diffusion. The organizers were glad to see the many connections between the presentations, cutting across theoretical approaches and empirical contexts. The workshop was the first in a series of seminars on Sustainable Innovation organized by the Smith School of Enterprise and the Environment.

