

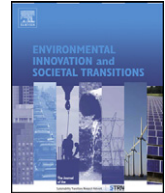


ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at SciVerse ScienceDirect

## Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/eist](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/eist)



# Economic-financial crisis and sustainability transition: Introduction to the special issue

---

## 1. Motivation

This special issue is the outcome of a panel session organized at the third International Sustainability Transitions Conference in Copenhagen (IST 2012, 29–31 August 2012).<sup>1</sup> This session was intended to address the relationship between the current economic-financial crisis and the transition to a sustainable economy. The relevance of incorporating the crisis as a research theme in innovation and transition studies is twofold.<sup>2</sup>

First, the crisis, and responses to it proposed by economists and politicians, may create opportunities, threats or barriers for a transition to a sustainable economy. Important questions here are: Are historical crises followed by, or do they even give rise to, major innovations and transitions? What can research on sustainability transitions learn from macroeconomics, sociology, innovation studies and other disciplines that provide insights about the nature and dynamics of current or historical crises? How can we integrate insights from (macro)economics into transitions thinking to make it more complete and effective in terms of policy analysis? And, how does the current crisis affect the feasibility and direction of a transition to a sustainable economy?

Second, one may be able explain the economic-financial crisis, or certain aspects of it, through the lenses of transition and innovation theories. Relevant questions in this respect are: What can transition and innovation research contribute to our understanding of the causes of, and solutions to, the current crisis? Which lessons for the current crisis can be derived from studies of major historical innovations, notably those employing long wave theories? What is the potential contribution of local, bottom-up experiments and initiatives to solving simultaneously environmental and financial-economic – notably unemployment – problems? And, which changes in analytical methodology are needed to better understand crises and their potential relation with transitions?

---

<sup>1</sup> The idea for the special session was initiated by Flor Avelino from DRIFT, Erasmus University Rotterdam, and elaborated in cooperation with the author. Flor further arranged practical issues, like communicating with the conference organizers and sending invitations to the four presenters. The session was chaired by the author, who subsequently invited additional contributions and acted as the editor of this special issue.

<sup>2</sup> This journal has published already some articles that address the connection between certain characteristics of the crisis and a sustainability transition. See Barbier (2011), Jackson and Victor (2011), Ashford et al. (2012), and Jacobsson and Jacobsson (2012).

There is a need for a more systematic research approach along the above two lines. The current crisis is expected to be of long duration. Some observers have even suggested it may take several decades to escape it. Several contributions in this special issue further suggest that environmental and resource problems are intricately linked to the causes of the crisis. Transitions thinking and policy design need to take this context – in the MLP (multilevel perspective) jargon: “landscape” conditions – more seriously. This implies explicit and structured attention for the financial-economic crisis in the research program of transition studies. One can thus analyze how proposed transition policies and strategies perform under crisis conditions, and whether they can relieve these conditions or benefit from them.

Speakers in the special session were Tim O’Riordan on “Sustainability in an age of austerity”, Derk Loorbach on “Financial-economic crisis from a transitional perspective”, Miklós Antal on “On incorporating macroeconomics in transitions thinking” and Frank Geels on “Transitions to a green economy – A research agenda”. The associated articles, with updated titles and some co-authors, are part of this special issue. In addition, Carlota Perez and Mark Swilling contribute articles focusing on the crisis from innovation and long wave perspectives, with Carlota comparing historical transitions, and Mark giving special attention to the case of South-Africa. These six contributions form the backbone of this special issue.

In addition, four researchers with a variety of expertise have contributed a short viewpoint. This was motivated by the fact that the relationship between the crisis and sustainability transitions is complex and multifaceted. We can, therefore, benefit from having many perspectives at our disposition as this will provide a broad basis for determining the challenges and possible approaches to tackle this theme. In fact, this special issue can be seen as defining a new line of research on “Economic-Financial Crisis and Sustainability Transition”. This may open up the dominant innovations’ perspective on transitions to influences from approaches that can provide a good understanding of the political-economy, sociological and macroeconomic aspects of transitions. Examples are conflicting policy aims (rising GDP, fair income distribution, full employment, environmental protection), power and vested interests, and fundamental debates on capitalism, growth, the role of markets and voluntarism.

## **2. Overview of contributions**

The contributions to this special issue are varied and largely complementary. They comprise historical perspectives, insights from innovation studies, pleas for local-level initiatives and experiments, discussions of processes and institutions at local, national and global levels, and connections between macroeconomic and environmental analyses. Distinct perspectives are presented, which is not surprising in view of the complexity of the issues and the diverse paradigmatic approaches employed to address them. Nevertheless, with respect to many important insights and viewpoints one can find multiple articles in support. There are also opposite viewpoints, though, notably on the need for, and possibility of, restoring high rates of growth (see the articles by van der Ploeg and Withagen, Witt, and Antal and van den Bergh). While most authors are positive about the opportunities for a sustainability transition, some express a more pessimistic view or identify barriers that are difficult to overcome.

Perez (2013) provides a logical opening contribution titled “Unleashing a golden age after the financial collapse: drawing lessons from history”. She puts us with our feet on the ground: this crisis is not unique, not an exception, but a recurrent historical event typically encountered in between successive technological revolutions. She provides evidence for the idea that crises following major technology bubbles contain much innovation potential that can be unleashed if the right public policies are implemented. Indeed, in the past several times financial recessions were followed by Golden Ages. She then proposes that the current era offers the possibility of entering a “green golden age”. The main question here is whether the conditions for governments to become proactive are as favourable as in previous times, notably immediately after WWII. The author thinks that economic revival in the form of a sustainability transition requires new institutions, equivalent to Bretton Woods and the New Deal, which are able to unleash the right types of innovation and investment. A precondition for escaping the financial crisis and redirecting investments towards sustainability is more transparency and regulation of the financial system, including at a supranational level. An important barrier to change is that the people who carry an important responsibility for the crisis are very rich and powerful and

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/108279>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/108279>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)