

Open and citizen science in sustainability research. Reflections on the responsible research and innovation (RRI) discourse

In recent years, there has been a critical awakening inside and outside of the scientific community with regard to the non-neutrality of the knowledge generation and distribution systems. While new approaches, concepts and movements have appeared (e.g. science and technology studies, post-normal science, citizen science, participatory action research or DIY science), the basic characteristics of our knowledge creating and disseminating systems have not changed too much. But is it possible to create and distribute valid knowledge on sustainability, if the system through which this knowledge emerges is characterized by strong power hierarchies, inequality or oppression? And is this the case? Does the current research and innovation (R&I) system reinforce unsustainability, perhaps even in the field of sustainability science? To what extent current practices of ecological economics research constitute part of the problem and/or points towards potential transformative pathways?

Recently, the concept of “responsible research and innovation” (RRI) has gained significant scientific and political attention. RRI aspires to be an umbrella term of concepts and practices that may further the transformation towards a different research and innovation (R&I) system. The discourse around RRI draws attention to a number of practices that are considered or claim to be responsible. Some of them are newly developed practices/approaches, while others may already have a history (however, they had not been called responsible formerly). While they may provide inspiration and constitute the basis of a different R&I system (that serves sustainability); these practices also require critical reflection.

This special session will bring together participants who seek for more responsible ways for knowledge production and distribution, and eager to critically reflect on both the mainstream and the proposed new practices of knowledge creation. It focuses on the way we create, validate and distribute knowledge; and intends to provide a critical reflection on them. It attempts to reflect upon the question: what kind of R&I system is required for sustainability and how ecological economics can contribute to it?