

Key Concepts in Processes of Sustainability Transformation

BELONGING

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DEFINITION

Belonging is the sense of feeling 'at home', feeling safe and emotional attachment. Belonging assumed as inherently present indicates the essential quality of belonging for human beings and it is articulated and politicized as soon as it is threatened. Belonging can be understood as a social location. Here belonging is a social category describing social and economic locations that are inherently political. Further, a social category can be analysed as external allocation "being identified with" (Graumann 1983) or "being part of" (Stengers 2005) a social or economic space. Secondly, belonging is an identification that is mostly collective, at times individual and narrates stories people tell about themselves. Moreover, these stories are expressions of emotional investment and desire for attachment and are performative. Identification is a conscious process as Stengers puts it "belonging in a conscious way", "you do not belong without knowing that you belong" (190). Subsequently the social location and identities are connected to ethical and political values because the performativity of belonging leads to inclusionary and exclusionary tendencies in society. Processes of maintaining a community as boundary work can challenge hegemonic political powers and are linked to politics of belonging. Examples of belonging in the field of transformation are communities of practices and niches that reflect belonging as a way of being in the world.

CONTEXT

Belonging is substantial in the disciplines Psychology, Sociology and the Humanities. From a micro perspective, Psychology has frequently engaged with the fear of separation individuals feel and how it influences their lives. The macro perspective in Sociology focuses on different ways people belong to collectives and states. Social Psychology studies groups and how membership in groups is created in order to belong. However, for transformative research that seeks to not only analyse and objectify, but to act upon the world, belonging

becomes a core dimension for engaging with the world to be transformed through a sense and practices of belonging.

RELEVANCE

In the field of transformation, belonging has the potential to overcome the dichotomy of human and nature by defining human as belonging to nature and as a state of being with the world. More so, when paying attention to the fact that belonging is crucial for understanding the behaviour of groups. For instance, tendencies of belonging in modern society employ consumption as way of defining a person articulated in a need to consume in order to belong, which can create disconnection to nature and feelings of tension for individuals. These tendencies reveal the inherently political nature of belonging. Thus, within the context of transformation towards sustainability, the discourse of belonging needs to be defined according to the common set of values sustainability provides. Sustainability initiatives and their ways of participating and learning in order to belong can potentially create momentum for positive change. Belonging as a way of acting within a niche and living a sustainable, holistic and embedded life can serve as inspiration for a sustainability transformation.

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