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[SPEAKER_00]

You are now listening to a podcast from the University of Stavanger

[SPEAKER_02]

So hello everyone, welcome to the episode 9 of the Reginno podcast by Center for Innovation Research, University of Stavanger.

In this podcast, we try to uncover stories, ideas behind academic papers that shape our understanding of innovation and regional economic development.

Today we have with us Gisa Pflitsch.

She's a postdoctoral researcher in economic geography at Boku University, Vienna.

Gisa, welcome to the Reginno podcast.

How are you feeling today?

[SPEAKER_01]

Yes, thanks a lot for inviting me here.

And yeah, I'm feeling great.

We already had a lot of interesting discussions earlier.

[SPEAKER_02]

Yeah, yeah.

Thank you also for giving us like a really insightful seminar.

I'll start right away.

What brought you to the field of economic geography?

What's the story behind this?

Yeah.

[SPEAKER_01]

Yeah, well, my path into economic geography was actually not a very linear one, I would say, because I originally studied communication science as a magister, so the former diploma for the social sciences in Germany.

And I wrote my final thesis on the topic of corporate social responsibility.

So it was already connected to the topics I'm working on now with sustainability.

And at that time, when I was working, I was also working for a large sporting goods company in Germany.

And I was a bit dissatisfied with only approaching this topic from a communication side, kind of.

And when I was finished with my thesis and I also started applying in that field, I realized that I really want to...

yeah, think more deeply about how sustainability, um, is organized within corporations and actually can also be organized in, yeah, in between organizations and with stakeholders in different countries.

And so I started searching for a suitable master program and I found a very interesting program in Marburg, Germany.

And I, I did an additional master in economic geography.

Oh, yeah.

Yeah.

Oh,

[SPEAKER_03]

And then a PhD and then a postdoc?

[SPEAKER_01]

Yeah, then I continued with a PhD because, yeah, in Marburg, it was a very small master program and we were working already very closely with the professors there, also a student assistants and professors. Yeah, I really had two very, I guess, influential professors there, also with Thomas Brenner and Simone Strambach, both working in the field of evolutionary economic geography and a focus on innovation, but from very different angles and with very different methodological approaches.

And I think this really made me getting interested also in research. And it really shaped also my understanding of research and my approach to it very much.

Yeah, then I did my PhD there and even stayed a little bit for my postdoc degree.

[SPEAKER_02]

Yeah.

Speaking about the type of research you have been involved over the last 10 years, what are the topics that you have been covering within this field?

[SPEAKER_01]

Yeah, I mean, I started already in my PhD to work on regional transformation processes to sustainability.

But I haven't really focused on one specific industry or socio-technical regime or something.

But rather, my aim was, I think, from the beginning to look at it less than a...

yeah, a technologically driven process, but more as a process driven by a change in values and cognitions.

And therefore, I started out with an institutional perspective, trying to understand like how regions over time, how kind of the institution is setting, understood broadly as...

yeah both more tangible elements like regulations or organizations but also these more informal elements like values norms cognitions changed over time and it was of course a challenge because how do you make yeah how do you trace such a change and

So yeah, I think I'm still trying to figure that out.

[SPEAKER_03]

So that's a perfect place for us to zoom in a little bit to your presentation today, which where you talked a lot about dissonance as a driver.

It was a super interesting concept for me.

Can you talk to us and also the audience a little bit about dissonance and specifically transformative dissonance and how that dissonance in values can be a niche for innovation as well?

[SPEAKER_01]

Yeah, I guess, as I said, I first started more with this institutional perspective.

And at some point, I guess I realized that we are facing more and more challenges.

problems which are really complex and wicked and where actors not only disagree about the solution but they actually already disagree about how the problem what the problem is in the first place kind of And also, I guess, by now, so now working at Buku University, where we do a lot of transdisciplinary research, yeah, conflicts and values become quite important.

Yeah, an important topic.

And they are often perceived mainly as an obstacle to innovation and transformation.

But I think my idea was that sometimes they can also be an important driver.

I mean, they sometimes put you in a rather uncomfortable position in the first place.

But then if you really try to understand other people, where they are coming from and what values underpin their perspectives and approaches, I think you often start to also develop something new, a novel solution, which goes beyond a simple consensus of some sort.

And so I have been working over the last, yeah, year to years i've working more with with valuation theory trying to basically figure out how or kind of the i think the the main question behind this is a little bit this question of of how people can create new possibilities for action when faced with this complexity and wickedness of the problems yeah yeah

[SPEAKER_02]

In your research, I was pretty much entrusted in the transformative university model that you have contributed towards, because this was the first line of research that I read from your work.

So how would you define a transformative university model and how is it different from the earlier existing models like you have entrepreneurial university, you have civic university, engaged university and what's changing in these universities?

[SPEAKER_01]

Yeah, it's basically based also on this idea that I think at some point, I realized that universities are increasingly dealing with problems where there's no agreement, as I said, on what the problem actually is, you know, and then there are often these value conflicts that they, yeah, I think,

You can circumvent by bringing together directly actors with very different, very similar value orientations, right?

Which is, I think, the way that it has often been organized in this entrepreneurial or engaged models, right?

And I think what a transformative university is really about or should be about is addressing this dissonance and working with it in a productive way.

Which is, of course, very challenging because I think the whole way universities operate

a build now and and also the context they are working in is very much attuned still to this entrepreneurial model which is very much

focused on you know finding rapid consensus on really efficiently working towards solving a problem and then upscaling it
And I would say that doesn't really work anymore, um, with regard to the problems we are facing and the challenges.

And yeah, so, um,
I guess, did I answer your question?

[SPEAKER_03]

But I'm reminded of a podcast that we had with Andy Stirling, who was one of our first podcast guests.

And he was talking about the difference between direction of innovation, directing innovation, and the directionality of innovation.

And all of these are in some way based on values, right?

And all three of these concepts would definitely include stakeholders with multiple values, right?

Yeah.

And you're coming in on this by saying that this conflict of values actually matters a lot while deciding all the direction, directionality, and directing innovation.

Yeah.

And this is also a question I asked you before in the presentation. How much of a segment should we keep during decision-making process for dissonance?

In steering transformations, how much space should we give to dissonance?

When do we know that this is actually now productive versus actually now counterproductive?

What's your experience on this?

[SPEAKER_01]

Yeah, it's a challenging question, but I think you kind of hit the key point because in the paper we also say, okay, generating dissonance is relatively easy.

And we say it's a necessary condition for transformation for us, but then the sufficient condition is also using it productively.

So that's really the key point.

And yeah, I think that at the moment, we are often not even generating dissonance in the projects and also in our research projects that we sometimes conduct.

It's from the beginning often very aligned.

It has to be also because the funding programs are different. kind of forcing us also to do it this way.

And we are this way generating a lot of outputs, short-term outputs, but not so much transformative outcome over the long run.

There's also this whole discussion about projectification, solutionism, you know, where you have a problem and you define the problem in a way that it already fits an existing solution, right?

And

I think it would be really important to open this up a little bit and spend more time on talking about how we interpret the problem in the first place and also letting different actors with different values participate in this process.

Because often I realize

When I'm in these transdisciplinary settings that people think they are very open, but then they mean something like, okay, I'm very open to different technological solutions, maybe for a problem, but they already have a certain way of how they are framing the problem and the problem solution.

It's maybe technical or it's more social.

And they don't even realize that there are other ways of framing the problem.

And at the moment, I see also in the literature, there's this strong focus on impact and implementation.

And I think that is also really important.

But this often then also leads to all the actors focusing on really quickly wanting to achieve or to implement something.

And I think that's a bit dangerous because then I think these value conflicts, they come up later again at some point.

Yeah.

Yeah.

[SPEAKER_03]

Just because you speed forward something doesn't mean that there are conflicts and values, right?

It might show up sooner or later.

Yeah.

That's a fantastic perspective.

[SPEAKER_02]

Yeah, during the presentation, you know, I want to carry this opportunity.

During your presentation, due to time constraints, you skipped that slide.

If I remember correctly, there was something related to imaginaries and futures.

Okay.

[SPEAKER_01]

yeah you missed that out uh because it will uh it's related to my research and i want to know about it yeah i mean i started a bit reflecting on that because i i knew you and Huiwen are also doing research on that and we've also recently worked together a bit on it and

yeah I think it's very also interesting to connect this to this yeah stronger focus also on the future imaginaries and how they kind of um yeah also shape agency in the present um because um i've also talked i mean indirectly i talked a little bit about this with this Vukanland region that i introduced during the presentation you know where we see a peripheral rural region um that did not as we would expect and as we often see just adapt to external pressures in this case a very

increasingly standardized industrialized production system on the national level but they really developed their own vision about the future and they really defined the values underlying this vision

And I actually think that this is something which is really crucial in order to avoid what we also often now call transition discontent in these often called left behind places, you know, and

I think also when we talk about this, we talk a lot about this place-based policy and how important it is, and I think it is very important, but I think for a place-based policy to really work, people in the region have to first define what is really important to them, what really counts.

and yeah so yeah i think it's very much linked to this topic also it's maybe not so much about like how this this narrative is developed but it's more about like how actors use certain narratives in order to also justify what's important to them

[SPEAKER_02]

Yeah, I was thinking it from the lens of how could dissonance actually propagate certain type of futures or which alternative future pathways could it actually stop.

I was thinking it from this lens as well.

Yeah, but thank you very much.

And then, as you know, every speaker or every guest...

Yeah.

Leaves a keyword for the next guest.

Last guest was Andres.

And for you, he left a keyword inequality.

Would you like to briefly spend some or maybe one or two sentences about inequality and how does that relate to your research?

Then also give a keyword for our next guest as well.

[SPEAKER_01]

yeah yeah okay yeah it's funny because i think um i have been thinking a lot and have been inspired a lot also by Andre's work of course also mentioned transition discontent and i haven't really worked on equal inequality or i've used this concept myself but i think

Often in economic geography, when we think of inequality, we think of something like income, wealth or material resources.

But I think what often matters just as much is whether people feel that they actually have a voice, that they are actually represented and that they can influence the future development of their region. So I think that would be also how I would connect my work to inequality.

And then another key word for the next speaker.

I think maybe it would be transdisciplinarity.

[SPEAKER_02]

transdisciplinarity okay yeah it's coming from boku i think it's something that is very yeah definitely yes on our mind yeah well thank you very much uh for joining us today it was a really insightful conversation Raj would you like to end this today

[SPEAKER_03]

No, this is super good.

Thank you very much, Gisa, for joining us and sharing your presentation and also staying with us in this podcast.

Especially in this podcast, we try to keep things a little bit calm and relate with all the audience as well.

And thank you so much for staying with us for that.

For all the listeners, until the next episodes, we thank you very much for tuning into our podcast.
Thank you very much.

[SPEAKER_01]

Thank you very much.

[SPEAKER_00]

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