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The meta level of greening territorial economies in times of climate change

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The transformation to a green economy is more than a purely technical issue. It requires a shift in the mindset of people in very different societies around the globe. In that context, Mesopartner recommends the application of the established Systemic Competitiveness framework (Sysco) in order to analyse and promote the structural change towards a carbon-neutral and resource-efficient society. A green economic and societal transformation needs to happen on all four levels (micro, meso, macro and meta), and will trigger feedback loops and systemic repercussions between the levels, many of which are not fully understood or anticipated yet.

In our work we have used the framework in various situations:

- To analyse and explain the energy transformation in Germany (used and adapted frequently during training and study tours).
- In our consultancy work on sectors, regions and clusters in emerging and developing countries.
- As an analytical framework for project and programme evaluations.
- Recently, to advise the design of a green industrial policy in Costa Rica.

Sysco allows the inclusion of aspects such as behavioural insights in the analysis of the meta level. In this article we focus on the specific relevance of the meta level.

The meta level was described in the original Sysco publication by the German Development Institute (GDI) as the layer which "... is made up of solid basic patterns of legal, political and economic organization, an adequate social capacity for organization and integration, and the capacity of the actors to achieve strategic integration." (Esser, Hillebrand, Messner & Meyer-Stamer, 2008: 25). The meta level is important because it refers to the mindset and beliefs of people in a national or territorial economy. We have to understand how people think, where incentives or sources of resistance for change are, what they value and consider significant to know how feasible green transformation is, and which direction stakeholders can or should take.

Determinants of systemic competitiveness at the meta level are:

- The orientation of the groups of actors towards learning and efficiency.
- The protection of interests and self-organisation in changing conditions.
- The social capacity of the groups of actors for strategic interaction.

In that sense “... enterprise competitiveness is based on the organisational pattern of society as a whole”, and the development of systemic competitiveness is described as a “social transformation project” (Esser et. al 2008: 21).

In the original paper Esser et al. (1996) state that “the environment was more a peripheral issue” (Messner, 2008: 51). Nevertheless, the Sysco framework is sufficiently versatile so that we can also use it to analyse and support the transformation of a nation or region to a low-carbon or green future.

Recent GDI publications again highlight the political or societal dimension of development. Today, the research is strongly focused on the green transformation and its relevance for developing countries.



Taking the example of energy efficiency (EE), the researchers refer to the gap between knowledge and implementation: there are numerous well-known benefits of EE, but consumers, organisations and societies as a whole are mostly hesitant about or sometimes resistant to taking these opportunities. It is not only about market failure – human behaviour itself can be another significant barrier to energy efficiency uptake. The authors propose the inclusion of “behavioural insights” in the design of EE programmes, which can also be extended to other green transformation policies (Pegels, Figueroa & Never, 2015).

The emphasis on the human factor is in line with increasing interest in behavioural issues by the global development community. The World Bank Report (2015) on *mind, society, and behaviour* aims to inspire and guide researchers and practitioners who can help to advance a new set of development approaches based on a fuller consideration of psychological and social influences. People do not always act in the rational way that (neo)classical economics assumes. Their behaviour is often contradictory: for example, it is biased towards the familiar and things they already own, and they





hold on to them even in situations where this causes economic loss (The World Bank, 2015).

According to the GDI researchers, we should consider four principles in order to incorporate behavioural insights:

- the cultural context of the target group
- the right time for the intervention (window of opportunity)
- drivers, preferences and motivations of the people's situation
- the overall fit of the intervention with a coherent package of measures (Pegels, et al. 2015: 1).

At the same time the authors emphasise the need to test and adapt the intervention, because even if the principles mentioned above are applied, an intervention can be ineffective or bring about contrary results. These findings help us to determine where to focus our attention when analysing and influencing the meta level.

As the SysCo framework was co-authored by the late Dr Jörg Meyer-Stamer, former researcher at the GDI and co-founder of Mesopartner, our company naturally

reverts to this framework and is interested in applying it to new questions. We have consistently found that SysCo is helpful to us in considering various elements that impact on territorial development, including why human beings behave in the way they do. In the context of this article, the meta level helps us to explore why and how people make the choice of whether or not to practice more resource and energy-efficient behaviour. Finding mechanisms to tap into this understanding of human behaviour without judgement is a critical starting point for reflection and gaining insight on how to support the shift to more sustainable choices.

References

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