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How to do Social Learning in a Digital World? Designing Inclusive Platform Politics and Infrastructures towards Environmental Justice

Workshop, University Bern 16th-18th December 2024



Image: Alfisyahr Izzati. Fieldwork in West Borneo. 2016.

Hosts

Institute of Social Anthropology & Centre for Development and Environment, University of Bern
IPB University Indonesia & Department of Anthropology, National Taiwan University

Mainstreaming sustainable ways of inhabiting this earth will require multiple economic and political transformations. It also requires new ways of knowledge production - and putting that knowledge to work. The concept of social learning points to a broad, collective learning process between communities, experts and governments. It builds on transdisciplinarity by setting a more ambitious goal: you know you have social learning happening, when relatively *passive* knowledge moves into knowledge as (collective) *doing*. As an artist, farmer or anthropologist might say: you know that you have really understood something - when you can do it. The social learning concept represents a complex ambition and highly dynamic field. It is, after all, a reformulation of a very big

question: how do people, how can societies change peacefully? **How can we effectively pursue intentional change in a non-violent manner?**

With this goal in mind, pioneers working at the intersection of public problem-solving, activism and academic research have created techno-social configurations. These include digital platforms for collaborative ethnography such as PECE, as well as critiques of digitally-enhanced social learning. **Active knowledge-building platforms** that valorize diversity in communities of practice are often inspired by environmental justice and decolonizing concerns. Problem-solving on issues such as the energy transformation can benefit from social learning in diversity by making a much wider range of concerns and expertise available. Working through necessary frictions, such platforms can work to integrate civic and scientific data, making different communities of practice mutually intelligible to each other. However, since digitally-mediated relations are as complex and power-inflected as live interactions, we urgently need to understand the **potential, risks and limitations of digitally-enhanced bridging platforms in social learning**.

We invite attendees to address the following family of questions. We have the pleasure of welcoming Bianca Vienni Baptista (ETH Zurich) and Tim Schütz (University of California, Irvine) as our key speakers. You may contribute to our inquiry with a classic **academic paper** or **roundtable** contribution. We also invite you to **exhibit a design of digital support-tools** and principles for social learning.

Social learning theory

- How does social learning relate to antecedents such as action research and related fields like transformative learning, or U-Theory?
- How can the goals, techniques and outcomes of social learning efforts be assessed?
- Where might the limits of social learning ideals and practice show up, e.g. because of their origins in Euro-American academic and development policy contexts? What might we need to unlearn?
- How does the practice relate to more oppositional forms of struggle for emancipatory change?

Digitally-supported social learning

- What kind of digital technologies, communication and networking modes can foster collective action around environmental justice concern? How might they be co-designed?
- What role does the creation of civic data play in social learning? How can this be digitally supported?
- How might different sets of actors position themselves, for instance, in the creation and use of shared data repositories? What platform mechanisms can foster trust and resolve conflicts in real-world contexts?
- How might digital modes truly reshape existing hierarchies and processes in struggles towards socio-ecological transformation?

Participants will acquire insights towards establishing bridging organizations and knowledge networks that foster social learning. Workshoppers will also explore case-studies on how social learning theory can be adapted to specific contexts, and how digital technologies may limit, or bolster inclusive collaborative endeavors.

This workshop will run from the afternoon of Monday 16th December through Tuesday and finish with lunch on Wednesday 18th December. We intend to create both an academic publication and accessible output for a wider audience. Please submit a title and 250-word description of your contribution by 21st October [here](#). Please also indicate whether you require visa support, funding for travel and accommodation. Feel free to email the workshop team with any questions: socialoceanenergy@gmail.com.