Preface

Since the publication of the Brundtland report in 1987, the goal of sustainability has increasingly gained the attention of a variety of societal actors, including public authorities, NGOs, consumer groups and industrial firms as well as researchers in a wide range of disciplines. At the general level, there is widespread consensus that various characteristics of modern societies are not sustainable and should change. When things get more prescriptive, however, many feel that the goals of sustainability seem to clash with other vital societal interests.

In recent decades, impressive results have been achieved in the environmental aspect of sustainability, for example by curbing the emissions of a variety of pollutants. Nonetheless, many feel that achieving the broader goals of sustainability is still remote since many problems appear extremely difficult to tackle, such as obtaining large reductions in the emission of greenhouse gases. Furthermore, the scope of the term of sustainability has become broadened to include a variety of goals, including a healthy environment, a healthy society and a healthy economy. To achieve this multitude of targets we seem to need fundamental changes, and these changes are denoted by terms like system innovation, transition and industrial transformation.

Across the world, researchers from different disciplinary backgrounds have begun to try to understand the processes underlying these changes and policy makers have begun to use these insights. In the Netherlands, for example, various ministries have set up so-called 'transition teams' who wrestle with the issue of how to set in motion fundamental changes towards achieving sustainability. This suggests a need to exchange insights, experiences and views between a divergent research community and policy makers.

This led to a Dutch initiative to organize an international workshop on 'Transitions Towards Sustainability Through System Innovation', held at the University of Twente in the summer of 2002. The workshop was funded by the RMNO (The Dutch Advisory Council for Research on Nature and Environment), the Dutch National Council for Agricultural Research (Innovatienetwerk Groene Ruimte en Agrocluster), the Dutch Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment, the Industrial Transformation Project of the International Human Dimensions

Programme (IHDP IT), the Greening of Industry Network, the Dutch National Initiative for Sustainable Development (NIDO) and the University of Twente.

The workshop was organized by an international steering committee and selected participants came from ten different countries. They included researchers with various disciplinary backgrounds as well as policy makers. The main goal of the workshop was to seek some common ground amongst the heterogeneity of approaches, and define an agenda for further work. This book contains a selection of ten papers that were prepared for the workshop and fuelled the discussions; it includes a general introduction and a conclusion that teases out some general findings.

We would very much like to thank our sponsors for making it possible to organize this workshop and all participants for their contributions as either authors or commentators and for their participation in the discussions making the workshop a success.

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