

## **Critical discourse analysis of perspectives on knowledge and the knowledge society within the Sustainable Development Goals**

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Critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough 2012) is employed to consider discourses of knowledge society in the Sustainable development Goals (SDGs), employing a genealogical approach which locates discourses in the field of prior discourses. Two prior discourses of the knowledge society are identified: a scientific-technical discourse, largely proposed by governments of developed countries, and a pluralist-participatory discourse, championed by academics and UNESCO. Knowledge and knowledge societies are found to have a marginal position within the main policy document ‘Transforming our world’, adopted by the UN in September 2015 (UN 2015). The technical-scientific-economic discourse is the dominant discourse at the level of implementation and goals, while there is some evidence of the pluralist-participatory discourse at the level of vision and strategy. This demonstrates that there is a mismatch between vision and strategy, and implementation and goals within the SDGs. The vision and strategy are, on the whole, transformational while the implementation and goals appear to represent a continuation of the status quo. Unless the implementation and goals are able to harness the transformational power of knowledge, expressed in the pluralist-participatory discourse and by the SDGs’ vision and strategy, efforts at achieving the ambitious agenda will be unsuccessful. There are, however, opportunities for those actors who are experienced in the transformational potential of knowledge to raise their voices in terms of discourses, narratives and arguments and to support implementation of the SDGs. On such initiative is the Agenda Knowledge for Development (Brandner and Cummings 2017) which has been developed by a group of civil society organisations, academics and others, and launched at the Global Partnership Conference: Knowledge for Development at the UN, Geneva, on 3-4 April 2017.

### **References**

Brandner, A. and S. Cummings (2017) Agenda Knowledge for Development: strengthening Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals. Austria: Knowledge for Development Partnership. 58pp. <http://www.km-a.net/kma/wp-content/uploads/Agenda-Knowledge-for-Development-and-Statements.pdf>

Fairclough, Norman (2012) Critical Discourse Analysis. In: The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Analysis, edited by James Paul Gee and Michael Handford, 9-21. Abingdon and New York: Routledge.

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