Groups of university and community networks have been coming together since 2010 to share information and call for further action to enhance community-university engagement. These discussions have been framed as 'Big Tent' dialogues and you can read more about these in a 'Links' section.

The 'Big Tent IV' group representing the Global Alliance on Community-Engaged Research and many other networks now ask:

How can the necessary social, scientific and technological innovations in small communities, in municipalities or councils be brought to people's minds to a level so that they really can contribute to a comprehensive social change, to the 'Great Transformation'?

The Grand Challenges and the Great Transformation

The impact of the grand challenges is not limited to specific areas of our lives. With their social, cultural, economic and psychological implications, they represent a shift towards a new era, which concerns all levels of the global community: markets and mindsets, global cooperation and democracy.

Grand challenges involve a combination of major public and private interests, are seen as key for realising future economic growth, and are concerned with important social and/or environmental problems. Grand challenges are not to be defined, assessed or solved by any single scientific or technological discipline or within one specific sectoral policy framework. Societies are facing complex, interlinked, global and local challenges. For challenges like healthy aging and climate change it is evident that we need new policies, new governance models, new innovation solutions and strategies, and new investment models. But the necessary holistic or generic approach also includes the need for highly specialised knowledge and highly specific technological and organizational solutions. Grand challenges involve many different stakeholders, are multidimensional, transdisciplinary, systemic and they require new ways of thinking which go beyond traditional frameworks and disciplines. And they lead to a need to re-think research and innovation policy. It is expected that the way politics, business and society handle these grand challenges will strongly affect the economy and society in the coming decades, both in Europe and worldwide. But the broad societal risks and problems represented by the challenges are at the same time also providing opportunities for new activities, goods and services and for moving towards a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy.[1]

[1] http://ec.europa.eu/research/erab/pdf/erab-study-grand-challanages-2012_en.pdf

The major transformations which took place in the past were generally the uncontrolled outcome of evolutionary change. By contrast, the forthcoming transformation requires forward-looking and knowledge-based management.
Scientific knowledge is an indispensable element of modern governance and is becoming increasingly important in our ever more complex world. This applies particularly to the present transition, which is beset by considerable uncertainties. The key to successful transformation lies in the linkage between invention, innovation and diffusion processes and the acceleration of these processes to make best use of the limited time available.
Policy can't rule and specify how science is performed, but policy can predetermine themes. On the other hand Scientific advice can make an important contribution to policy-making, by analysing the wealth of complex information, offering integrated solutions, exploring opportunities, and communicating the results effectively. The task of the scientific community is therefore to identify policy options; it is a matter for the democratically elected decision-makers to decide on the appropriate course of action.[2]

Civil Society' Requests towards Science and Research Policy[3]

Education should help to create problem awareness and promote systemic thinking, thus empowering people to participate in and shape the transformation process. Transdisciplinarity in this context means to learn the different languages for the dialogue.

Science policy in the past was only little-noticed by civil society's associations. Here we see a powerful change, because civil society has the impression that the science system does not take on the pressing societal challenges such as climate change, resource scarcity, urbanization or affordable health in an aging society - the so-called "Grand Challenges" - in sufficient numbers and with adequate means.

The subsequent demands of civil society on the scientific and research policy reflects an initial consensus of civil society organizations. The following version has been discussed and further developed in plenary workshops a number of times.

[2] http://www.wbgu.de/fileadmin/templates/dateien/veroeffentlichungen/factsheets/fs2011-fs1/wbgu_fs1_2011_en.pdf
[3] based on Civil Society' Requests towards Science and Research Policy as discussed among German NGOs (enabled by Plattform Forschungswende (http://www.forschungswende.de/)

Key Questions

- How should the science and research system to be organized in 2025?
- What type of science and research is needed to be implemented to make a shift to the "Great Transformation"
- What needs to happen for the Great Transformation to succeed and enter a turn in the kind of research?
- What are the challenges at individual, organizational or societal level? How can we overcome this?
- What kinds of obstacles can make the transformation of science and research fail?
- How can the guiding principle of sufficiency strengthen the leading concepts in shaping research programs and research institutions?
- What resources are needed for the transformation of research?
- What specific contribution can you or your civil society organisation make?

Big Tent IV: The Global Communiqué

The following working hypotheses and requirements will be made transparent in a participatory process to the public and discussed. They then will be published as the 4th Global Communiqué to all networks.

1. Allow more civil society participation in research through participation of civil society organisations in the formulation of research questions and programs and representation in bodies of publicly funded scientific institutions.
2. Establish a science forum and a civil society research fund
3. Foster capacity building in science policy
4. Develop and implement transparent agenda processes for the list of priorities of public research funding
5. Expand significantly research programs and activities for future topics and transdisciplinary research
6. IntegrateCivil Societyin problem formulation, integration of practical knowledge in and implementation of research projects
7. Strengthen the establishment of community-based, participatory institutions such as Science Shops or Community Based Research centers.
8. Support disciplines overarching structures of sustainable science at universities and existing non-university centers of excellence to promote transdisciplinary sustainability research.
9. Give free access to research results and further develop fundamentals and quality standards of transdisciplinary sustainability research
11. Provide 1.5% of total annually for more transdisciplinary sustainability research.
12. Ensure adequate equipment for universities for basic research and teaching, in particular by increasing the basic ratio