

# 4 Sustainability Communication as Field of Research

## Lesson 02: Methodologies used / Studies

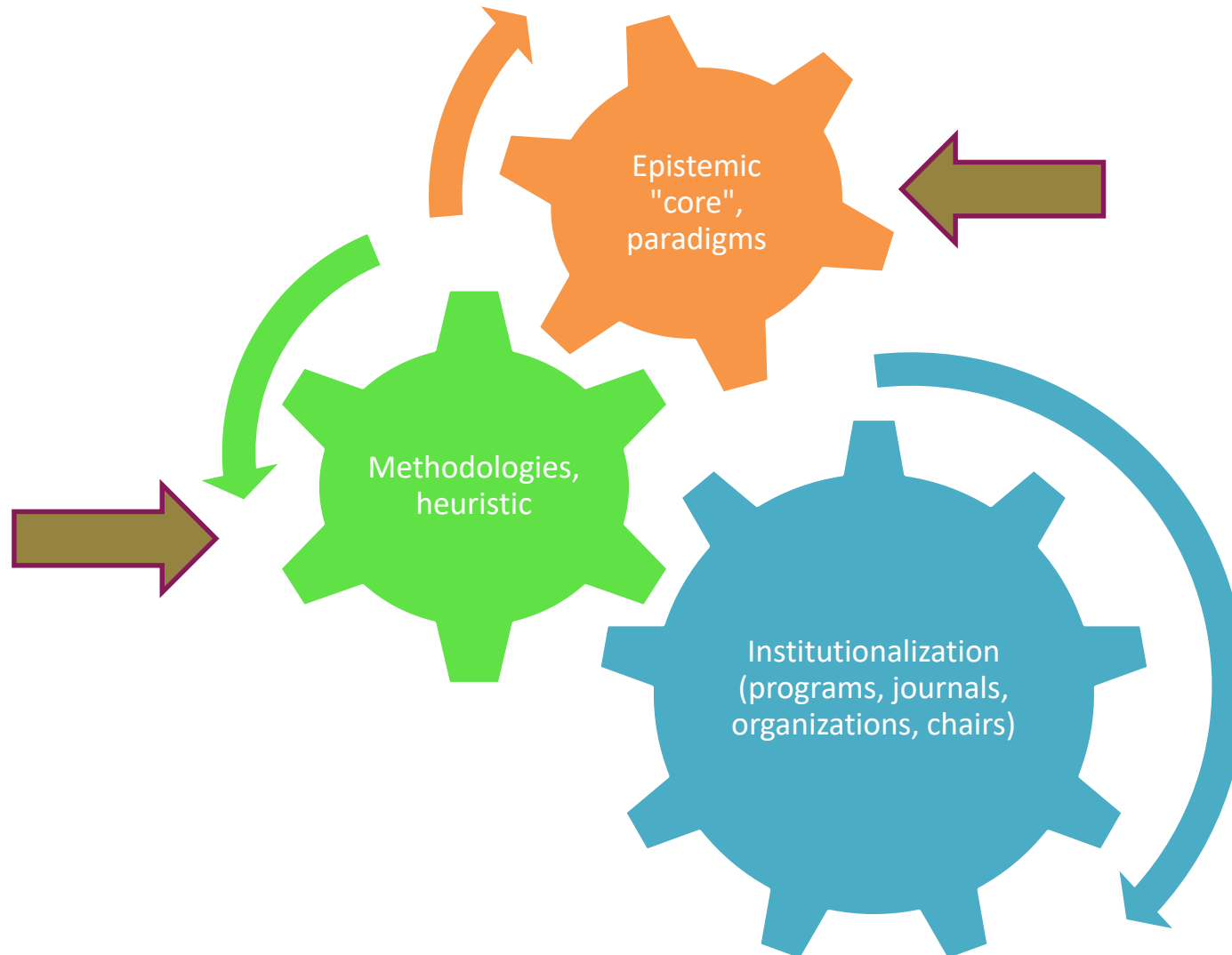
Assoc Prof. Dr. habil Franzisca Weder  
School of Communication and Arts  
The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia

 Universität Bremen

**ZMML**  
Zentrum für Multimedia in Lehre



# Overview





## Where are we?

Episode 4.1: Literature review, status quo

**Episode 4.2: Methodologies used / studies**

Episode 4.3: Institutionalization of sustainability communication

Episode 4.4: Future methodologies, engagement



## Learning outcomes

### Learning outcome 1:

**Describe** the diverse nature of contemporary practices of sustainability communication on an individual, organizational and societal level, the relationship of strategic communication practices to other public communication practices, the role of stakeholders and publics and the communication practitioners in and outside of organizations (corporate, NGO, political and educational institutions etc.)

### Learning outcome 2:

**Develop** comprehensive and well-founded knowledge in sustainability communication as field of study, an understanding of how other disciplines relate to the field and an international perspective on the field.

### Learning outcome 3:

**Understand** the key elements of communication theories, strategies and tactics, and, thus, the character and operationalization of best practice sustainability communication planning frameworks.

### Learning outcome 4:

**Advance** your understanding of social and civic responsibility and develop an appreciation of the philosophical and social context of sustainability communication. Advance your knowledge and respect of ethics and ethical standards in relation to communication of, about and for sustainability.

### Learning outcome 5:

**Anticipate and Interpret** current issues and challenges of a world in transformation and social change. Develop a deep understanding of and skills to create change, develop advocacy, leadership and authorship in and for sustainability communication.

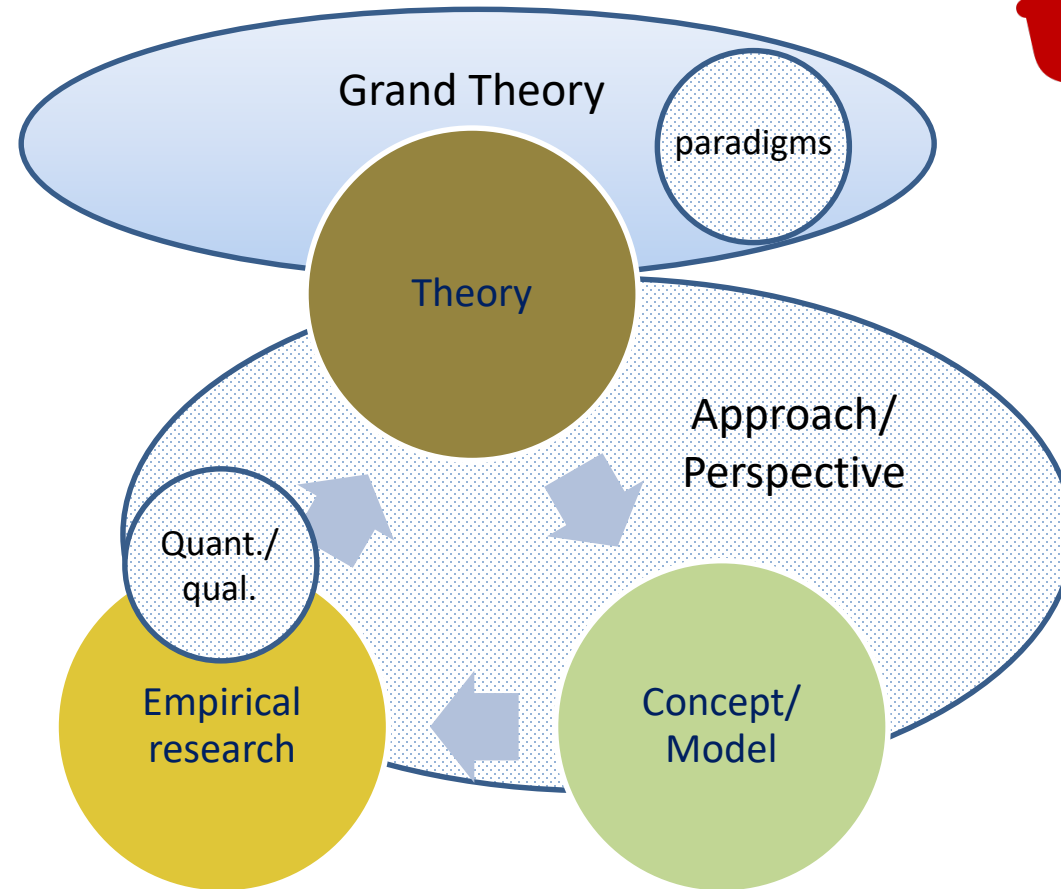


# Overview

- A. Heuristics
- B. Methods used in Sustainability Communication so far



# A. Heuristics





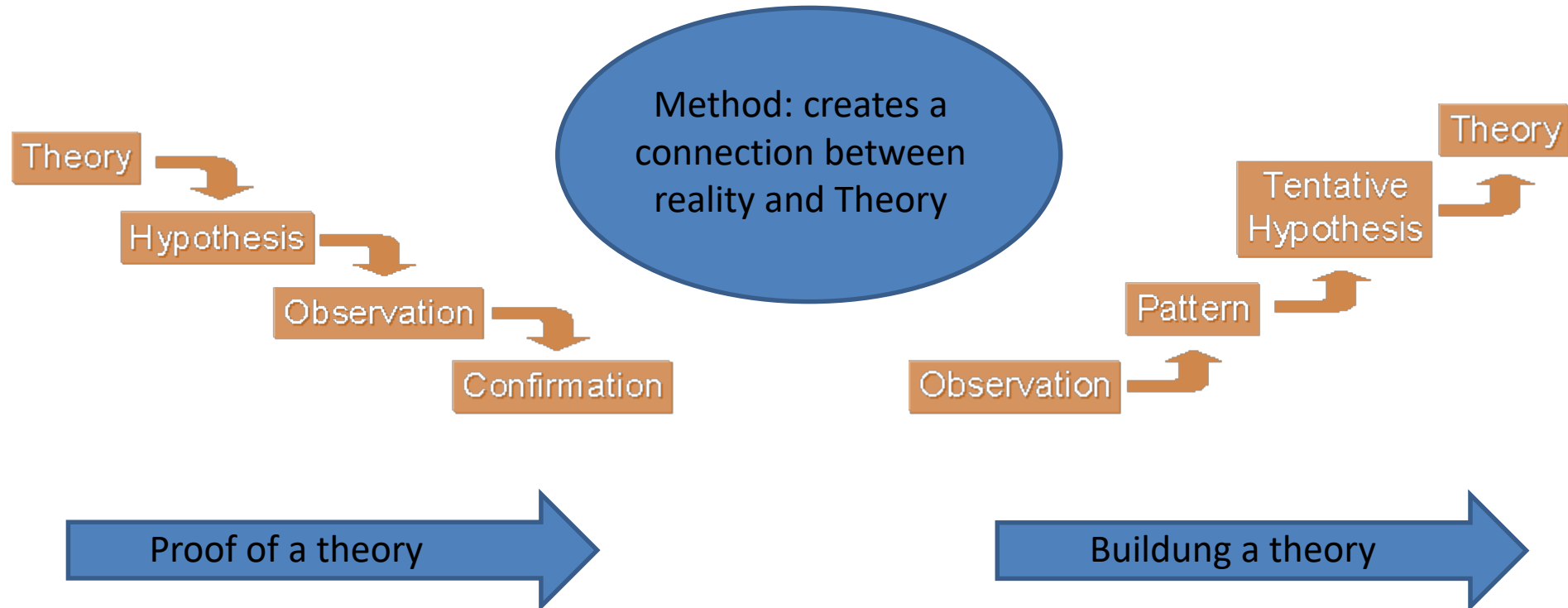
## A. Heuristics

- Functionalist vs. critical
- Pragmatic vs. constitutive
- Positivist vs. interpretative
- Descriptive vs. explorative, critical
- Transmission vs. sensemaking, constitution



## A. Heuristics

- Deductive vs. inductive





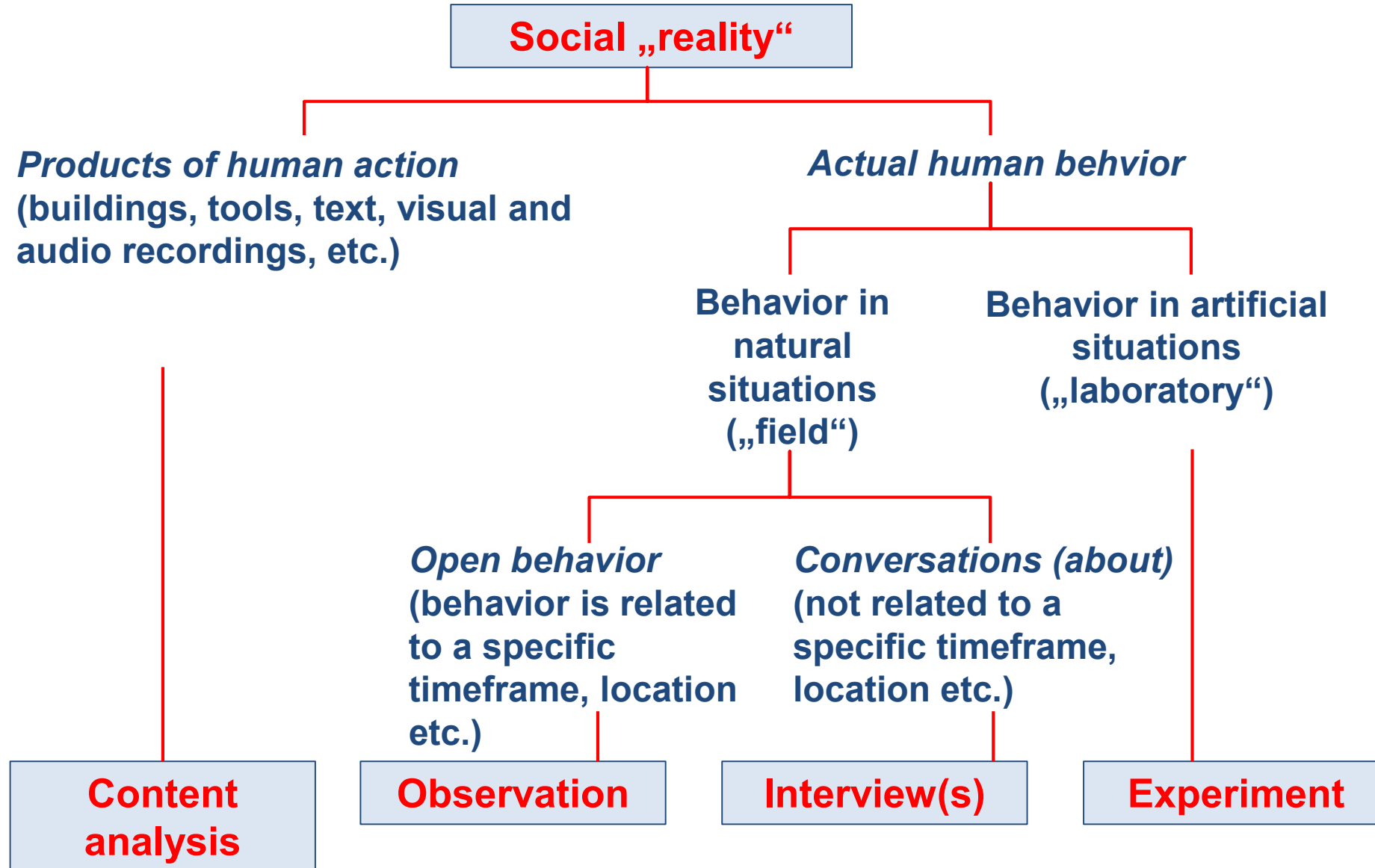


## A. Heuristics

Quantitative Research Confirms -  
Qualitative Research Explores



# A. Heuristics



Quelle: Atteslander, Peter. Methoden der empirischen Sozialforschung. Berlin 2008, ESV, S. 49



## B. Methodologies used so far

Status Quo: again, predominantly functional, pragmatic understanding of communication = predominantly quantitative studies

Examples:

- Sustainable Consumption: communication as “tool”, marketing, label, promotion; strategies devoted to educating consumers, designing eco-labels on product packages, and “nudging” shoppers to make responsible choices (Matthias et al., 2016; Sunstein, 2015; Golob et al., 2021)
- Sustainable Tourism: branding etc.
- Renewable energy: acceptance, campaigns
- CSR Reporting: topic modelling, issues, dimensions, monitoring/measurement
- Climate change communication: framing in news media; journalistic framing



## B. Methodologies used so far

Status Quo: again, predominantly functional, pragmatic understanding of communication = predominantly quantitative studies

Methodologies used:

- Surveys (social-psychology; effects; acceptance/opinion)
- Media / text analysis (reporting, websites, media)
- Case studies (business)

Examples: Covid-19 & restrictions made us more sustainable (Weder et al., 2022); COVID-19 is an opportunity to reduce over the longer term the prevalence of lifestyles premised on large volumes of energy and material throughput (Cohen, 2021); social media effects on food choices (Simeone & Scarpato, 2020), Demoralization of (m)eating behavior (Weder et al 2022)



## B. Methodologies used so far

Status Quo: again, predominantly functional, pragmatic understanding of communication = predominantly quantitative studies

Methodologies used:

- Surveys (social-psychology; effects; acceptance/opinion)
- Media / text analysis (reporting, websites, media)
- Case studies (business)

Examples: Evolution of the Sustainability Story (Weder & Baker, 2021), Evolution of Sustainability Reporting (Busco & Sofra, 2021)



## B. Methodologies used so far

Status Quo: again, predominantly functional, pragmatic understanding of communication = predominantly quantitative studies

Methodologies used:

- Surveys (social-psychology; effects; acceptance/opinion)
- Media / text analysis (reporting, websites, media)
- Case studies (business)

Examples: Sustainability communication in tourism (Tölkes, 2018); Swiss companies Stiller & Daub, 2007



## B. Methodologies used so far

Status Quo: again, predominantly functional, pragmatic understanding of communication = predominantly quantitative studies

Methodologies used:

- Surveys (social-psychology; effects; acceptance/opinion)
- Media / text analysis (reporting, websites, media)
- Case studies (business)

Less used:

- Art based approaches
- Storytelling, narrative interviews
- Ethnography
- Discourse analysis
- Focus groups / WhatsApp, online
- Network analysis



## Outlook

Sustainability communication - new methods needed:

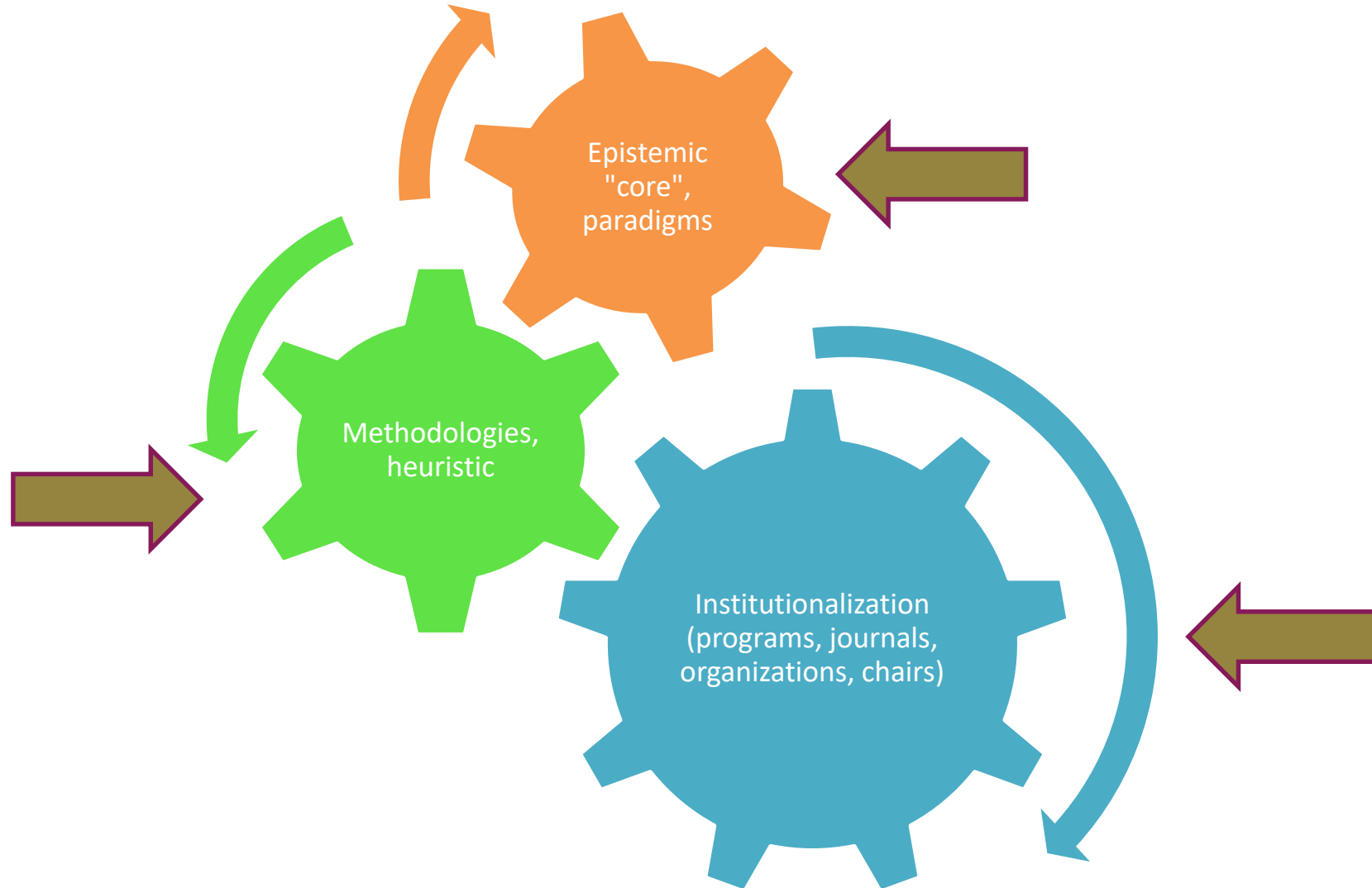
- Empowerment strategies; communication and participation
- interactive approaches geared towards shared meaning-making, deliberation, and social learning
- Education / BNE, ESD
- Communication planning, future workshops, advocacy planning

„The more open and encompassing a scientific community, the more socially robust is the knowledge, it produces“. Openness in this context does not only refer to an institutional or an object-related openness, but also includes a methodological and methodical openness. „In order to fill out the epistemological core, it continuously takes a plurality of scientific traditions“.





# Outlook





## Reflection

- What are the well established methods applied to describe sustainability communication phenomena?
- Why is that – or: what are the disciplinary perspectives that „direct“ the methodological choices?
- If you would have the chance to design a research project to better understand sustainability communication,
  - what would the question be?
  - What methodology would you apply?
  - Why?