

12 QUESTIONS TO DAVID LUDWIG

1. From your point of view, what are today's most pressing environmental problems?

We're still treating nature primarily as a resource frontier. As long as this is our primary relation to nature, we can't innovate our way out of social-environmental crises. Even if we reduce the environmental impact of individual technologies, we'll just extract more resources to produce more stuff until we exhaust nature's self-sustaining and regenerative capacities.

2. When looking at potential improvements in our environment, what gives you hope?

Many of the mechanisms driving social-environmental crises are inherent in the structure of global capitalism. As much as I would love to be an optimist about emancipatory alternatives, I don't see much evidence of imminent systemic change. To be honest, I sometimes struggle with hope. At the same time, I do not want to become a cynic who has nothing to offer beyond complaints about a broken system that can't be fixed. Community-based research inspires me to do better. I have learned most from working with communities who are taking action to change the material conditions around them, and for whom hope is a catalyst for solidarity and mutual help.

3. Is there a particular environmental policy reform you admire the most?

I have found it liberating to think of governance as a multi-level process from community to global scales. International agreements and treaties do not have to be the focus of our admiration. For example, I admire what our collaborators at *The Centre for Indigenous Knowledge and Organizational Development (CIKOD)* are achieving together with local chieftaincies in Ghana. Not only are these local policies informed by the daily needs of people, but they also aim to transform policymaking at national and supranational levels through organizations such as the *Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA)*.

4. Which trend in environmental policy and politics do you consider an aberration?

There are many low-hanging fruit in times of "green capitalism," "sustainable development," and "emissions trading". But we also need to look critically at our own scholarship and practice. So much empty intellectual radicalism in academia, disconnected from peoples' actual needs and struggles for better futures.

5. Why environmental communication and campaigning?

We need to get out of our disciplinary bubbles to contribute to change. Our data and theories may be great, but if they are not

aligned with other social structures, they will just produce more journal papers. Communicating and campaigning are two mechanisms for building the coalitions and communities needed to actually contribute to change in times of social-environmental crises.

6. What has your experience been when it comes to transferring scientific insights into practice?

Well, I'm trained as a philosopher of science. In academic philosophy, we're disciplined to keep our distance from practice. To talk about people rather than with people. It has been a long learning journey for me to connect my academic training with practice. But it has been an enormously rewarding journey – social-environmental problems are full of epistemological, ontological, and political complexity that require philosophical reflexivity and reflexive action.

7. What field of research in the environmental sciences do you find most exciting?

I don't think ethnecology gets nearly the attention it deserves in terms of understanding epistemic diversity and the interplay between people and the environments.

8. Can you name any person or event that has had a particular influence on your commitment to environmental issues?

We have been working with the Brazilian fishing community of Siribinha for eight years. In 2019, a large oil spill reached the community, covering the beaches, polluting the mangroves, and poisoning the fish. From one moment to the next, everything the community depended on for its livelihoods was covered in toxic waste. It reversed many of my questions: From "What can communities contribute to philosophical debates?" to "What can philosophers contribute to community struggles?"

9. What knowledge about the environment would you like to pass on to young people?

I may have to become even older, but I certainly have to become wiser before I can have messages for other generations. I'm still mostly confused.

10. As a person concerned with environmental and especially climate communication, what contradictions do you face in everyday life?

There are many deep contradictions between working at a university as a state employee and doing community-driven research. Unfortunately, the agendas of the communities I work with and the state I work for are often not the same.

11. What are you reading at the moment?

I'm currently reading Thomas Sankara's *Speaks: The Burkina Faso Revolution, 1983–1987*. It includes his 1986 speech "Imperialism is the arsonist of our forests and savannas," which is a truly under-appreciated classic of political ecology.

12. Apart from the ones we've raised here, what is the most important question of our day?

Nationalism and nation states. The human condition, from climate change to economic inequality to viral pandemics, is globally intertwined. That we're still shaping moral commitments and political strategies along the borders of nation states is the source of endless suffering and violence from environmental destruction to the dehumanization of immigrants. We won't get out of this without a new internationalism.



David Ludwig,

Associate Professor at the Knowledge, Technology and Innovation (KTI) Group and Principal Investigator of the *Global Epistemologies and Philosophies (GEOS)* project at Wageningen University & Research, NL.

Trained as a philosopher of science (PhD Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, DE, 2012), Ludwig combines philosophical reflection with community-based action research. The goal of *GEOS* is to make action research more reflexive and philosophical reflection more actionable in the face of social-environmental crises.

Publications (selected): *Transformative transdisciplinarity: An introduction to community-based philosophy* (forthcoming, with Charbel El-Hani) | Southern ontologies: Reorienting agendas in social ontology (*Journal of Social Ontology* 2024, with others) | Transdisciplinary philosophy of science: Meeting the challenge of indigenous expertise (*Philosophy of Science* 2023, with others) | What's wrong with global challenges? (*Journal of Responsible Innovation* 2022, with others) | *Global epistemologies and philosophies of science* (2021, with others) | *Philosophy of ethnobiology: Understanding knowledge integration and its limitations* (*Journal of Ethnobiology* 2021, with others).

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DAVID LUDWIG ...

I first met David in 2017. We had been awarded a pan-European project *Responsible Research and Innovation in Practice* and were searching for a postdoc at Wageningen University & Research, NL. Out of more than 70 applicants, David's application rose to the top of the pile. From his curriculum vitae and letter, we could see many of David's qualities: already holding a VENI fellowship from the Dutch Research Council (NWO), David showed an outstanding combination of analytical skills and a desire to link his scholarship with practical action. He excelled in the project, not only delivering first-class results, but also having the ability to take the project in novel and unforeseen directions, such as new perspectives on epistemologies of responsibility from a global perspective. He also proved to be an excellent team player and collaborator.

Two years later we had an opening for a faculty position in our chair group – Knowledge, Technology and Innovation (KTI) – and David was persuaded to apply. He was duly appointed, not least because of his capacity and willingness to work with almost every member of the group. Indeed, one of his first achievements was to be the main editor of a KTI edited collection *The politics of knowledge in inclusive development and innovation* (2021), a project that had been dormant for many years but needed some fresh impetus. David co-authored no less than four chapters with five fellow members of the group.

In 2019/2020, David achieved the remarkable feat of securing both an European Research Council (ECR) Starting Grant, and a VIDI grant from the Dutch Research Council (NWO) at the same time. Combining these, he set up an integrated research project, *Global Epistemologies and Ontologies of Science (GEOS)*, aimed at bringing together philosophical and empirical research on global negotiations of knowledge and social-environmental challenges. From fieldwork sites in Mexico, Brazil, and more recently Ghana and China, David seeks to link global debates on science and sustainability to domains of local and embedded practice.

Following a PhD in philosophy of science at Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, DE (2012), David ventured into more interdisciplinary debates about science and society, engaging with scholarship on science and technology studies (STS), political ecology and communication sciences. His research interests include negotiations of scientific categories and ontologies – from philosophical debates about natural kinds to applied questions of intercultural communication and transdisciplinary design. Furthermore, through processes of cross-cultural and interdisciplinary dialogue, David pioneers work at the interface of debates on "global challenges" and "global justice" in science and technology.

As well as being a great researcher, teacher, grant-writer, supervisor, organiser and collaborator, David demonstrates an evolving and commendable relevance and impact on sustainability transformations and the understanding of the global environment. His impact lies in his ability to integrate scientific and societal knowledge from an epistemological and ontological basis, to do so in a spirit of social justice and with practical regard to local communities and their situated realities, and to use this knowledge to engage productively with policy communities.

Prof. Dr. Phil Macnaghten, Chair in Technology and International Development, Knowledge, Technology and Innovation group, Wageningen University & Research, NL.