

Definition and attributes: Introducing transdisciplinary research

Definition

Transdisciplinary research aims at crossing boundaries between scientific disciplines and societal actors to develop knowledge that can help to address, mitigate, or prevent sustainability challenges.

A transdisciplinary research process links societal problem-solving with scientific evidence using a process of co-producing knowledge. It includes relevant societal actors and scientific disciplines from the outset of a project. As a collaborative group, they jointly analyze the problems, discuss what could be more desirable futures, define concrete goals, and cooperate on strategies and actions.

Attributes

Transdisciplinary projects have common attributes that distinguish them from other disciplinary or interdisciplinary projects. The following eight attributes, especially when occurring in combination, can be used diagnostically. A typical transdisciplinary project:

- Aims to work on societal challenges;
- Aims to be an ongoing social-learning process for the researchers and other participants;
- Recognizes that sustainability issues are most often complex, requiring attention to be paid to problem definition and setting boundaries, as well as ongoing adaptive and non-adaptive change;
- Often takes a conscious normative position, seeking to promote agreed sustainability principles or some other “common good”;
- Appreciates that there are different perspectives, knowledges, and ways of thinking and doing, some of which it will usually seek to integrate;
- Typically requires attention to relationships, power relations, and trust both among the researchers and with the societal actors;
- Usually seeks to provide a more systemic and comprehensive understanding of the problem, as well as determining what could be done and how best to achieve this outcome; and
- Is almost always context dependent, but generally also strives to achieve outcomes that can be adapted to other contexts.

Further reading:

- [Partnering Change: Link Research Societal Challenges](#). 2024. Network Transdisciplinary Research.
- [Australia National University Transdisciplinary Working Group \(2023\) Framework Building Transdisciplinary Expertise](#). 2023.
- Bammer, G. 2020. [Choosing Suitable Transdisciplinary Research Framework](#). Summary Article GAIA. : Integration Implementation Insights Blog.