

TRANSDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH: HOW TO STAY WITH THE TROUBLE AND ENABLE CO-LEARNING?

Selen Eren

University of Groningen

Anne Beaulieu

University of Groningen

David Ribes

University of Washington

Nienke van Pijkeren

Erasmus University Rotterdam

Abstract:

Having societal relevance and social impact is increasingly becoming relevant evaluation criteria for STS researchers, just like for researchers in other fields. More and more, researchers are expected not only to understand the phenomena they study, but also to contribute to the stakeholders around/of that phenomena. STS researchers' projects are often funded directly by those stakeholders themselves, expecting clear 'recommendations' or contributions from research outcomes. In other cases, the drive for (social) impact come from researchers themselves, especially when they think that STS insights can be particularly relevant and useful for a specific public discussion, like in the corona truth wars (Harambam, 2020).

At the same time, both proponents of interventionist STS approaches (Zuiderent-Jerak & Jensen 2007; Zuiderent-Jerak, 2016) and critics of value-driven transition management (Shove & Walker, 2007) are cautious about the limited agency, predictability, and/or legitimacy of researchers who are expected to monitor/map out the phenomena, diagnose the bottlenecks, and orient/facilitate the stakeholders to achieve the desired change. Accordingly, transdisciplinary research as an approach is not a simple bridge connecting society and relevant academic research with a smooth one-way road from the latter to the former (Hahn, Hoffman, et al. 2018). Rather we imagine it as a space that is at times productive or uncomfortable, where participants feel frictions, need to negotiate, and hopefully co-learn, mostly without knowing where the process will eventually lead them.

We are inviting papers that reflect on the everyday politics and practices of transdisciplinary research and that can contribute to supporting each other in this journey. The questions we are interested in include, but are not limited to, the following:

- How is transdisciplinary research enacted in practice and how does it differ from how it is imagined?
- What is the skill set needed to enact it as imagined?
- How is it played out in various contexts, what gets in the way, and what can we learn from each

other?

- How does translation work between researcher(s) and stakeholders takes place; how are knowledge(s) and truth(s) negotiated?
- What might be some low-hanging fruits in this kind of work?
- How do small-scale contributions (also) matter?
- How to design the collaborations to manage uncomfortable expectations, and care for vulnerable positions in which researchers and stakeholders can easily find themselves?
- How to square the uncertainty of the method with the expectations of meaningful contributions from each side?
- What are moments of friction and what are the mechanisms to work with them?
- What are the benefits and pitfalls of interventionist approaches and how are they distributed across actors?

Key words:

Intervention, transdisciplinary research, methodology