



UNDERSTANDING & IMPROVING
THE SUSTAINABILITY OF
AGROECOLOGICAL FARMING
SYSTEMS IN THE EU

Using transdisciplinary research to understand transition to agro-ecological farming systems

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Sustainability challenges call for integrated and holistic system approach

transdisciplinary and
participatory research



Transdisciplinary research

- addresses real, complex problems recognized as both societal and scientific (Pohl & Hirsch Hadorn, 2008)
- goes beyond distinct disciplinary concepts and theories (Klein, 2010)
- incorporates academic and non-academic knowledge and experiences often using participatory approaches (Lang et al. 2012)
- is critical and reflexive (Jahn and Keil, 2015)



Participatory research

participants collaborating to problem solve and produce new knowledge in an ongoing learning and reflective process

(Blackstock et al., 2007)



Participants' involvement

- information
- consultation
- collaboration
- empowerment

(Brand et al., 2013)

Interactive knowledge generation

- one-way information
- mutual one-way information
- collaborative research
- joint decision-making

(Wiek, 2007)



Transdisciplinarity in UNISECO

- consortium composition
- setting up networking and knowledge sharing platforms
- inclusion of participatory methods in all project phases



Multi-Actor Platforms (MAPs)

2 levels: EU & Case study

- Guidelines for MAP members selection
- A guide to transdisciplinarity for partners
- Design, monitor and evaluate MAPs performance



Evaluation of transdisciplinary research is complex

- integration of knowledge from various disciplines
- development of dynamic methodologies that are context and problem-specific
- involvement of non-academic actors

(Carew & Wickson, 2010)

- widely approved quality standard and definition of successful transdisciplinary research are challenging

(Jahn & Keil, 2015)

Diversity of approaches for evaluation

- Development of evaluation frameworks (e.g. Blackstock et al., 2007)
- Development of quality criteria and guidelines (e.g. Lang et al. 2012)
- Ex post evaluation measuring societal impact (e.g. Walter et al. 2007)
- Measurement of process and outcome (e.g. Hassenforder et al., 2016)

In general, methods and criteria should be tailor-made to:

- the project's aims and context
- actor's expectations and interests



Proposed framework for UNISECO project

- Objectives
- Evaluation criteria
 - Questions
 - Indicators
- Monitoring procedures & data gathering
- Reporting process



Proposed framework for UNISECO project

- process of project activities in which MAPs are involved
- planning, implementation and completion phases
- on-going feedback from MAPs members & project partners
- adjust and improve the approach every six months



Suggested evaluation criteria

- **Representativeness:** representation of the key stakeholder groups, diversity of viewpoints, interests and values

Key issues: *How legitimate the representation was perceived to be?*

Have all relevant stakeholder groups been targeted and participated in the activity?

Indicative participant evaluation questionnaire items:

I think that all interests have been represented in today's meeting.

I think that there were groups, associations, persons that could contribute to the discussion but have not been invited.

Suggested evaluation criteria

- **Group dynamics:** participants' ability and opportunity to participate and influence the process, outcome and other participants

Key issues: *Did participants follow the principles for involvement in the MAPs: Respect - Sharing - Listening - Attention - Teamwork*

Indicative questions in debriefing/reporting sheet:

Were some voices more dominant than others?

Did participants talk over each other?

Did all participants have the opportunity to communicate their opinions?



Key points for effective participation process

- Transdisciplinary approaches seem to offer potential to social learning
- Focus on process of MAPs engagement and how activities are carried out
- Clearly communicate the purpose and role of MAPs members
- Ensure a transparent process in identifying and selecting the MAPs members
- Ensure all MAPs members have equal access and capacity to participate



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Thank you for your attention!

