

Feasibility of success monitoring in SHBM's

Problem encountered and objective

Obtaining research funding, for example through the Horizon Europe programme, is a very competitive affair. Researchers set out increasingly ambitious goals within limited time frames (e.g. 4 years). Projects such as SoilValues are interdisciplinary, and expect their researchers to take an active role in co-designing and implementing solutions for soil health. The social- and technical processes that are necessary to develop soil health business models (SHBM's) take more time than expected, which requires us to rethink the feasibility of measuring success in SHBM's.

Main Results and Outcomes

Soils are slow, and measuring changes in soil health takes time. In most Testing Grounds of the SoilValues project, the first 2-3 years were spent aligning stakeholder motivations and incentives into a network-level business model which changes the context for farmers, allowing them to increase soil health as part of their farmlevel business model. This left just 1 or 2 years to serve as data points, which will be most useful as a baseline for future evaluation of the SHBM's (e.g. by the CoP around the SHBM).

Alternatively, one could study the economic performance of the SHBM to measure the project's success. This too proves difficult, as the SHBM's are still undergoing iterative improvements, building the necessary knowledge and skills required to operate more efficiently. A "final" evaluation within the project's timeframe would therefore be an unfair assessment of the SHBM's viability in the long-term.

What you can do is a rigorous qualitative assessment of SHBM's (see D2.3). This is often (unjustly) met with disappointment by the research community and project evaluators, who generally display a strong preference for quantitative data and easy-to-understand outcomes.

Practical recommendations

- While business model theory at the individual farm level is rooted in quantitative approaches, business model innovation at the network level is a fiercely social process, requiring qualitative approaches to achieve and monitor success
- Breaking a niche innovation into the dominant socio-technical regime takes time. Be patient. Budget accordingly.
- Make the qualitative assessment more understandable through the development of compelling narratives
- It's just not that simple



ABOUT SOILVALUES

SoilValues is a Horizon Europe project that will contribute to the development of successful soil health business models across the EU to improve soil quality and provide land managers with the necessary incentives.

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USEFUL LINKS

 <https://soilvalues.eu/>

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 <https://zenodo.org/communities/heuropesoilvalues>

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