

Role transitions in transdisciplinary research

Problem encountered and objective

Addressing complex sustainability challenges requires collaboration among practitioners, stakeholders, researchers from different disciplines, and policy actors. In transdisciplinary research, this means researchers move beyond traditional data collection and analysis roles. A master's thesis, conducted within the SoilValues project, explored these role changes through interviews with SoilValues researchers.

Main Results and Outcomes

Nine researcher roles were identified, largely consistent with the literature: **traditional scientist, reflective scientist, self-reflexive scientist, knowledge collector, knowledge producer/integrator, choreographer, process facilitator, change agent/transition participant, and transition leader.**

While the literature often describes role transitions during transdisciplinary projects, researchers in SoilValues reported relatively stable roles throughout the project. Researchers showed strong intrinsic motivation, particularly through the opportunity to contribute to improved soil health. This created a strong sense of purpose and personal reward. Key competencies across the identified roles include open-mindedness, cultural sensitivity, trust and relationship building, experience, collaboration, communication skills, and resilience in dealing with challenges.

Practical recommendations

- Acknowledge that researchers' roles in transdisciplinary research projects are shaped not only by individual backgrounds but also by the surrounding structural conditions—institutional practices, funding mechanisms, and organizational arrangements.
- Define clear roles and responsibilities at the project's outset to minimize role ambiguity. These roles can evolve organically from thereon throughout the project.
- Establish formal structures to facilitate knowledge exchange across work packages.
- Provide financial compensation or dedicated budget lines for non-research contributors to address ethical tensions around unpaid labour
- Expand academic evaluation and promotion criteria to recognize transdisciplinary contributions alongside traditional peer-reviewed publications.



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/>
-  info.soilvalues@kuleuven.be
-  <https://zenodo.org/communities/heuropesoilvalues>

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