Knowledge Exchange between Quadruple Helix Stakeholders on Sustainability

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Knowledge Exchange between Quadruple Helix Stakeholders on Sustainability: How Can Transdisciplinary Knowledge Networks Facilitate Sustainable Knowledge Exchange and Contribute to Complex Societal Issues?

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Today's complex urban and societal challenges require more diverse types of knowledge and actors to be addressed since they are set within complex interactions and a constantly changing environment. They require knowledge produced in the context of application, by communication, and negotiation between heterogeneous stakeholders in a transdisciplinary (TD) setting. HEI's are increasingly seen as a pivotal partner in addressing complex societal challenges and are driven to alight from their ivory towers and collaborate across sectors, between disciplines and - most of all - with societal partners. Likewise, students need to be prepared for their professional life with 21st century competencies to be able to tackle today's challenges.

One of multiple ways to put this into action is bridging the gap between both theory and practice and on-campus and off-campus learning. In this article we present a case study of a knowledge network where approximately thirty diverse quadruple helix stakeholders in a specific local geographical area are interacting to exchange knowledge, learn from each other and address their challenges in the local sustainability transition. The network consists of citizen groups, associations, NGOs, welfare organizations, social entrepreneurs, municipality officials, academics, and students. The purpose of this case study is both to operationalize a local knowledge infrastructure to foster urban sustainable development and to provide the city as a learning environment for students by providing questions for coursework for interdisciplinary student teams from local HEIs, referred to as Community Service Learning activities.

Through a participatory action approach, also 'reflexive monitoring in action' (RMA) is employed to evaluate the effects of the TD process and practice for all stakeholders. Effects may manifest themselves in various values, respectively the content value, affective value, strategic value, network value, and instrumental value (the translation from content value to concrete actions). Within four iterative phases: planning, action, observation (analysis) and reflection (evaluation, revisiting), mutual learning is stimulated and reflexivity is enhanced through monitoring of and reflection on the TD process, goals, strategies, actions and contexts.

Data is gathered through field notes, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups. Network activities are iteratively steered and adjusted based on the emerging content during interactions and reflections on the process.

Interim results show both added value of the operationalization of the network as challenges in its development and anchoring. The process thus far shows content, network, and affective value. The network activities contribute to increased knowledge on dealing with challenges. Additionally, the activities have network value for those involved by getting to know other relevant actors and making relevant links for collaboration to increase impact. Also, making these links and learning from each other's practice generates a sense of cohesion. However much potential for instrumental and strategic value is experienced as underexploited, which gives rise to questions of governance and

ownership, aim of the network, balancing power balances between the various societal stakeholders, students, and researchers, the value of knowledge developed, and its dissemination and impact.

By concretizing a knowledge infrastructure in co-creation with all partners, mapping needs, evaluating the process, and identifying enabling and constraining factors, we aim to contribute to understanding and improving the impact and working mechanisms of a TD process. Additionally we aim to advance integration of the variety of stakeholder roles, expertise and values.

A transdisciplinary arena in policy design – from on-the-ground practice to a Covid-19 induce pause

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Transidisciplinary (TD) tool boxes can improve dialogue between participants. Yet, to the best of our knowledge, very little is discuss regarding the time needed to create common grounds, understanding and a TD mindsets. We are very concern with this and are testing an approach that implies frequent and long term dialogue between TD participants. During four years we facilitated a dialogue platform between academic and non-academics regarding the sustainability a high nature value farmland culturally rooted in the Alentejo region in Portugal (the Montado). A total of 22 face-to-face meetings involving 153 different actors were developed. Each section was design considering guiding questions, small group discussions, plenary discussions and a few other techniques that improve mutual understanding (e.g. conceptual modelling, visioning).

This dialogue platform designated Tertúlias do Montado still exists; however from this platform we have created a smaller one titled as: TD arena for the design of future policy interventions for the Montado. This TD arena started in 2018 and includes around 20 participants: researchers from several disciplines, land managers, land owners and public administration. The start of this TD arena was smooth because of the capital created during Tertúlias do Montado. Hence, all participants knew how we needed to work in order to "get the job done".

The aim of the present work is to:

- provide an overview of how the TD arena functions;

- present the lessons learned from this TD arena while face to face activities were possible (before Covid-19) and during the several lockdowns (after Covid-19).

Until the start of the pandemic situation, the group would meet regularly. Each meeting was facilitated by a skilled facilitators. The roles of each participant were well defined and smaller working groups created to arrive at specific objectives. A key moment for the group was a 3-day trip to Ireland to discuss the transferability of the Burren Program to the Montado case. A total of 23 meetings and 18 field work visits occurred so far.

During the pandemic situation, the TD arena continued to work by one to one meetings, virtual gatherings, and field work. The lack of collective meetings meant more time to think and question each other. Of course that questioning is part of the everyday activity of researchers; yet, during