

## *International Social Science Journal*

### **Special issue on Interdisciplinary and Transdisciplinary Research in Social Sciences**

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#### **Introduction**

Societies are facing critical points in their development, where large challenges are becoming increasingly difficult to handle. Numerous conflicts and complexities are surfacing – to which we can see societies responding with fragmentation, intolerance and exclusion. These multifaceted problems cannot be effectively confronted from the sphere of individual disciplines, because they are not individual problems, they are interrelated and “intrinsically linked in a meta-system of problems”, and as such cannot be solved in isolation. Complex problem situations require what has been defined as a transdisciplinary approach. There are many definitions of transdisciplinary innovation and transdisciplinary research, but a general consensus is that transdisciplinary innovation has the following characteristics: it is action-oriented and future-focused, participatory, holistic and systemic, and purposive, and it transcends individual disciplines or practice. One way to address such developments is through societal transformation processes that implicitly include a variety of interest groups, stakeholders and organizations. Transdisciplinary research is one approach that focuses specifically on co-generating and integrating knowledge and expertise from a variety of sources, including communities, research, cities and businesses. It is an approach that is driven by the need to create processes where values and transformations towards a more just and sustainable society are openly debated. The term “transdisciplinary” was originally coined and developed within academia as a response to the fragmented organization of universities into faculties,

schools, and degrees. More recently, transdisciplinarity is increasingly relevant to innovators and entrepreneurs whose technologies or solutions are aimed at addressing complex societal problems. This larger-scale emphasis moves innovation beyond a “customer-centered” to a “society-centered” perspective, and it requires active collaboration with public and private sector organizations, governments, and communities. A transdisciplinary approach to innovation differs from multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches in that it is not just about working towards a shared goal or having disciplines interact with and enrich each other. Instead, transdisciplinary innovation is about placing these interactions in an integrated system with a social purpose, resulting in a continuously evolving and adapting practice. A by-product of transdisciplinary innovation is that the integrated solution contributes back to the disciplines it drew upon to evolve them, too.

This special issue will include a rich and nuanced set of takeaways for practitioners, academics, and members of the public or third sectors. We highlight four of them here, regarding learning, spaces, levels of impact, and partner selection.

**Pivotal ideas of this special issue:**

*Recognizing that transdisciplinary innovation is more than coordinated input from multiple knowledge domains to solve a problem.* With transdisciplinary innovation, solving the problem results in new knowledge forming via the integration of those domains that contributes back to them. In other words, learning is an inherent part of transdisciplinary innovation. This learning can occur by individual innovators or as a collective. The unpredictability of transdisciplinary innovation requires giving it “space” and not overconstraining or controlling it. The unpredictability of transdisciplinary innovation requires expansion rather than possession.

*The consideration of what the level of impact of the innovation is.* Does it only affect the innovator? Or, does it affect the collective group of people directly involved? Or, are the broader social implications of greater importance? Answering these questions can influence how you aim to fund transdisciplinary innovation projects.

*By encouraging readers to carefully choose their partners for transdisciplinary innovation projects.* This means being conscious of the respective disciplines or practices being integrated as well as being conscious of there being expertise in shepherding the transdisciplinary innovation process. Transdisciplinary innovation can be painfully laborious if the process is left to emerge organically. There must be alternative approaches in which the integration can be designed into the process at a very early stage.

## **Streams:**

### **Societal transformation**

- The experiences in initiating and fostering transformation processes we have and what can be learned from them.
- Different theories of change and their contribution to sustainable transformations.
- Forms of organization needed for our institutions, agencies, companies and universities to handle the necessary transformations, with collaboration between stakeholders.
- Skills and competences needed by civil servants, researchers and students to codesign and lead processes to target sustainable outcomes.

### **Methodological innovation**

- Individual and organizational learning in change processes; the shape of working on, challenging and transgressing borders.
- Universities promoting collaborative learning.
- Different types of transdisciplinary pedagogies, research methods and processes of coproduction developed to effectively contribute to societal transformations.
- Theoretical development
- Imagining and conceptualizing a sustainable and inclusive knowledge economy.
- The core challenges in transdisciplinary research regarding ontological and epistemological issues – worldviews and paradigms challenged, and kind of knowledge produced.
- Transdisciplinary research engagement with systems thinking, scenario planning, design thinking and other holistic theories and practices.

The overall focus is on what we can learn from our collaborative experiences, case studies and practices regarding wider societal transformation, methodological innovations and theoretical development. We will specifically search for “sites for change” in terms of spaces, practices and

learnings where transdisciplinary research and co-production play a crucial role. Transdisciplinary research has expanded into several areas such as urban development, health, pedagogy, indigenous studies, natural resource management, art, etc. Transdisciplinary research has also attracted researchers from a variety of related approaches, for example action research, participatory social science and sustainability science. An additional goal of this special issue is therefore to bring together this growing body of practitioners and researchers who are working in different types of collaborative research and change processes, to gauge the state of the art in both research and practice from across sectors and disciplines, and to create an international forum where diverse groups can exchange experiences and learn from each other.

To submit manuscripts, view Author Guidelines and instructions on submission please see the [ISSJ homepage here](#).

Manuscripts should normally be between 6,000 and 8,000 words, including all notes, tables, graphics and references.

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