

Workshop “[Mechanisms for transdisciplinary co-production](#)”

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## **Transdisciplinary Co-Production as a Path to Science for the Public Interest: Workshop Report and Key Outcomes**

### **1. Introduction**

The workshop on transdisciplinarity was organised by the Chair in Philosophy and History of Science at the Technical University of Munich and the TUM Public Science Lab (Sabina Leonelli) in collaboration with Pianeta (Stefano Rimini), an Italian NGO focused on young and citizen engagement on social inequalities and environmental challenges.

The primary aim of the workshop was to explore approaches to co-production of research and transdisciplinary engagement of a variety of different publics, drawing from the conceptual perspectives and practical experiences of the organizers and participants. The event featured a combination of presentations, group discussions, and a plenary session to reflect on key outcomes and action points.

### **2. Structure of the Workshop**

The workshop started with a presentation by Leonelli and Rimini on their conceptual starting points and on the meaning they assign to co-production and transdisciplinary engagement with various examples of such activities from their own experiences with Pianeta, the Climate Pact Ambassador Network and the UNICEF ECARO children and adolescents participation experience, as the Youth Advisory Board (YAB). The presentation is available as a PDF file as part of this repository entry.

Following this presentation, the participants formed five break-out groups that discussed transdisciplinary initiatives they have been involved in and challenges they encountered, as well as solutions trialled across different countries and contexts. The final part of the workshop was devoted to summarising and discussing results in a plenary session.

### **3. Key Insights from the Plenary Discussion**

The final discussion highlighted several key points. Participants discussed the importance of **including diverse perspectives**, such as patients and local communities, in research,

particularly in peer review processes. Challenges included the **need to change evaluation metrics** to prioritize societal impact and the difficulty of engaging researchers in early-stage research design review.

Solutions proposed included **providing resources and guidelines for participatory research, defining target of interventions, emphasizing plain language summaries, and leveraging AI for dissemination**. The discussion also covered the importance of **understanding target needs, effective communication strategies, and the role of universities** in supporting community-engaged research.

Most relevant were the **difficulties noted in forming and sustaining long-term community engagement** initiatives, **the lack of funding**, infrastructures and recognition for such work (both within and outside academia), and the importance of framing engagement not as linear provision of information (“telling people the facts”), but rather as an exercise in listening and understanding what various publics need and expect from research, and how scholarly work can fit ongoing social and political initiatives and interventions.

The Public Science Lab in Munich is currently being set up as an example of offering models for similar initiatives.

#### **4. Action Items and Conclusions from the Final Discussion**

To advance the goals of transdisciplinary research, several action points and concrete recommendations were identified:

- Explore ways to **include various forms of expertise in the development and evaluation of research**, such as efforts to include patients, frontline medical doctors and community members in peer review processes in biomedicine, or agriculture-facing policy-makers and farming associations in agronomic research.
- **Make use of existing community engagement strategies and venues**, as well as engagement with art projects and local education efforts as ways to engage existing social networks.
- **Encourage and strategize involvement of public administration** and small-and-medium-enterprises in local engagement activities.
- **Elaborate long-term strategies for demonstrating social impact**, beyond short-term economic measures. Lobby for the recognition of long-term social impact as an assessment category, whose assessment can happen in a variety of forms including narratives and witness statements.
- **Advocate for changes in the way researchers are evaluated**, moving away from a focus on publications and towards more diverse metrics that capture societal impact and engagement.

- **Raise awareness among institutions, funders and public administration of the laborious**, time- and resource-intensive nature of transdisciplinary work and the challenges of building expertise and networks over many years. Recognise and value the crucial importance of social skills and relationships in creating novel forms of expertise and participation.
- **Develop guidelines and resources to support researchers in conducting participatory research** in a responsible, safe and constructive way.
- **Investigate the barriers to engaging with high school students and work with schools** and teachers to design more relevant and fruitful outreach activities. Identify and work with relevant gate-keepers at the target institutions.
- **Explore the use of AI and other technologies to help synthesize and communicate research** findings in a more accessible and engaging way for the public.
- **Refrain from top-down forms of disseminating information**, focusing instead on dialogue and responses to social group's own concerns and questions. Emphasise personal experience and connections, and use life stories to exemplify the significance of research and evidence for everyday social life and needs.
- **Identify and support platforms for communication and exchange** which are already favoured by the target publics, while at the same time avoiding services that pose risks to participants' data (such as services that are not subject to GDPR and/or not offering guarantees around privacy and non-for-profit use of data).
- **Be mindful of the strain and demands of widening engagement** in research not only for the researchers involved, but also for participants who need to juggle such activities with little to no reward and often under economic and social pressures.
- **Connect ongoing engagement work and related research with ongoing political initiatives and decision-making**, thereby ensuring that such engagement provides evidence and experience to inform policy.
- **Investigate crowdfunding and volunteer opportunities** to support the organization of festivals and events focused on preserving local intangible heritage.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

The workshop successfully fostered **reflection and knowledge exchange on transdisciplinary engagement**. Participants emphasized the value of listening, co-designing research with communities, and rethinking how research impact is assessed. The need to shift from "telling people the facts" to engaging in dialogue and co-creation of research processes and outcomes was a recurrent theme. The workshop highlighted the complexities and challenges of this work, particularly the strain on participants and the undervaluation of community engagement in academic settings. Proposals to address these issues, such as

new evaluation metrics, sustained funding, and enhanced participatory research guidelines, were seen as crucial for moving forward.

The establishment of the Public Science Lab at TUM was noted as a promising initiative to model and support these efforts. The collaboration with Pianeta exemplifies the potential of cross-border partnerships, particularly those that connect local activism and academic research to advance social justice and environmental sustainability.

The proposed action points are intended to inspire future activities, policy shifts, and broader transformations in the way transdisciplinary research is understood, valued, and supported. For updates on this work, please follow Pianeta ([www.pianeta.org](http://www.pianeta.org)) and the Public Science Lab in Munich ([www.opensciencestudies.eu](http://www.opensciencestudies.eu) ; <https://www.sts.sot.tum.de/en/sts/research-groups/philosophy-and-history-of-science-and-technology/> ).

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