Transdisciplinary abilities unfolded by early career researchers through their participation in INREF research projects

Abstract:

To battle complex global sustainability problems, a different approach in science is desired to create solutions and actionable knowledge. One type of research that aims for this is transdisciplinary research for sustainability, which includes working together with multiple disciplines as well as with non-academic actors. As transdisciplinary research is a demanding endeavour, a wide range of abilities are used for engaging into transdisciplinary research. This thesis explored those abilities, through the lens of the triple S- heuristic focusing on care for Science, Society and Self. The abilities unfolded by transdisciplinary researchers are thus investigated by looking at scientific excellence, societal engagement and self-care. The target group existed out of early career researchers that have finished their PhD research funded by the Interdisciplinary Research and Education Fund (INREF) at Wageningen University. The results show a wide range of abilities are needed for scientific excellence, including among others, critical thinking, integration and complexity, curiosity and reflexivity. Abilities for societal engagements were more difficult to detangle, engaging society in general was seen as most important ability. Abilities for self-care included, among others, being modest and setting limits on the scope of the research. In general, the development of abilities was stimulated by good supervision and interaction with other disciplines. The results revealed that integrating and balancing out those multiple sets of transdisciplinary abilities is challenging. While the abilities for scientific excellence had priority over the others, abilities for self-care were the most neglected. The respondents also missed training on transdisciplinary abilities. This thesis ends with recommendations for further enabling the cultivation of transdisciplinary abilities

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