

Interfaces between context and formats and methods in transdisciplinary research. *tdAcademy Brief Reflection Guide #2*

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This second Special Section of *Frontiers in transdisciplinary and participatory research in GAIA* explores the importance of context-sensitive choices and adjustments of formats and methods in transdisciplinary (TD) research. Starting from the understanding that TD research is always embedded in specific inner, outer, and spatial-temporal contexts, the contribution highlights how suitable formats and methods are required that enable collaboration with relevant stakeholders, as well as the integration of diverse knowledge forms. By conceptualizing formats as structuring elements and methods as operational means of collaboration, and by addressing typical barriers such as resource constraints, communication challenges, institutional settings, and differing expectations between scientists and practitioners, it highlights how their careful alignment with context can strengthen both societal relevance and scientific rigor.

A focus is placed on TD literacy as a key prerequisite for shared process knowledge, mutual appreciation, and trustful cooperation in TD research.

The *tdAcademy Brief Reflection Guide #2* builds on the insights of this Special Section and invites readers to reflect systematically on contextual conditions, formats, methods, and competencies across different levels (table 1). By translating the conceptual insights into open-ended, non-prescriptive reflective questions, the guide supports teams and organizations in critically examining their research design and collaboration practices. We pose two types of questions: ones that help identify challenges and ones that support concrete action. They can serve as a starting point for dialogue and shared learning to strengthen TD practices. The guide aims to stimulate critical reflection and contribute to a culture of conscious, impact-oriented TD research.

TABLE 1: *tdAcademy Brief Reflection Guide #2*: Context-sensitive design of transdisciplinary research through formats and methods.

QUESTIONS FOR DIAGNOSIS	QUESTIONS FOR TAKING ACTION
INDIVIDUAL LEVEL (RESEARCHERS AND ACTORS FROM SOCIETAL PRACTICE)	
■ Who (including whose ideas, and which epistemologies) is currently included and who is missing from the process, and why? ■ What is the current level of trust between the different actors within the project? What influences this (e.g., previous experiences)?	■ Which format or methods best engage the inclusion of approaches or diverse perspectives, especially of those less represented or marginalized? ■ What strategies can I use to continually assess and improve the inclusiveness of the project as context shifts? ■ Which methods can help to (re-)build trust and how can I ensure that trust-building is an ongoing part of the process?
PROJECT LEVEL (TRANSDISCIPLINARY PROJECT TEAMS)	
■ Which context conditions are (most) relevant for my choice of format? Are the properties of the formats in question suitable or how can I adapt them to the project's requirements? ■ To what extent does my chosen format allow for adjustments to changes in context that might occur?	■ How can I ensure that my chosen format is purposefully aligned with both key context conditions and the overarching objectives of my project? ■ How can I ensure ongoing reflection and adjustment of formats via methods as the project context evolves?
INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL (RESEARCH ORGANIZATIONS AND SCIENTIFIC SYSTEM)	
■ What hierarchical structures exist outside my project team and how might my choice of format either reinforce or help mitigate these? ■ Who benefits from the research project? What benefit can be offered to the participants?	■ Which format or methods can compensate constraints related to external hierarchies? ■ How can I design processes that enable equitable participation and ownership?



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The series *tdAcademy Brief Reflection Guides* encourages readers to engage with transdisciplinary research reflexively, drawing on their individual experiences and expanding them to wider transdisciplinary research contexts. The questions are open-ended and non-prescriptive, acknowledging the diverse forms that transdisciplinary research can take. The guides aim to stimulate critical reflections, to start dialogues, and to contribute to a culture of conscious transdisciplinarity.

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