Water Transformation Pathways Planning Project (Trans-Path-Plan)
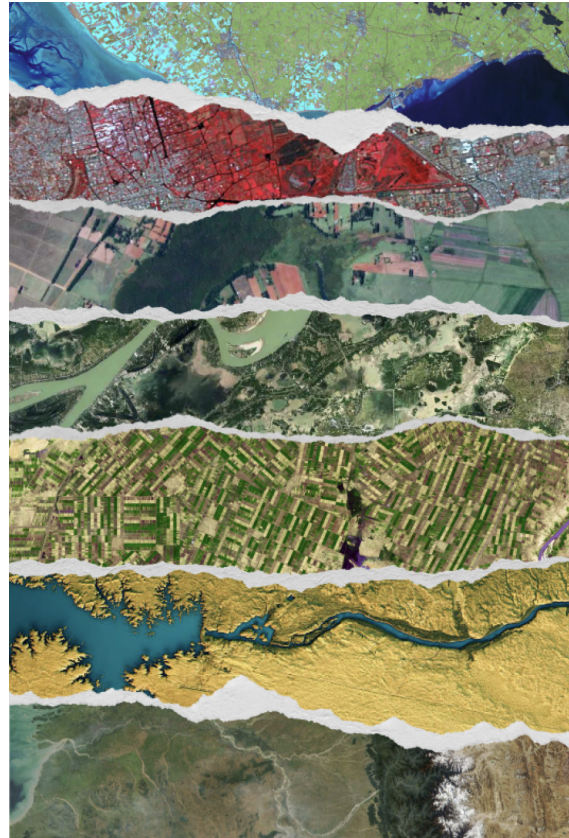
Report on the workshop:

"Exploring research designs and methodological approaches towards transformative praxis"

Workshop dates: June 19-22, 2023
Venue: UNAM, Mexico City
Format: Hybrid workshop (Zoom and in-person)

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Workshop objectives

General objective

Co-create a space for collective reflection to gain a deeper understanding on the importance of our work ethos on our research theoretical-methodological approaches and potential to achieve social-ecological transformations.

Particular objectives per day

DAYS	OBJECTIVES	
Day 1 - Project nodes presentations / Research design and ethics	**Morning objective** Share key updated information about each node and their case studies, including what they aim to achieve within the scope of the project and how.	**Afternoon objective** Undertake a collective reflection to discuss what underlies the methods we choose by identifying and articulating positionality, political stance, and research design for collaborative projects.
Day 2 - Transformative methods and tools exchanges	**Morning objective** Exchange methodological challenges and learnings (i.e., creative solutions) of each node.	**Afternoon objective** Broaden everyones' toolkit and reflect on the relationship between possible methods and transdisciplinary research principles, and focus on one transformative futures' method to strengthen group capacities.
Day 3 - Field trip to urban wetland	Experience hands-on activities for promoting relationality, as these provide opportunities for individuals to engage with others and the world around them in a more embodied, experiential way.	
Day 4 - Workshop harvest and next steps	Delineate concrete next steps, and explore possibilities of convergence between case studies.	—

Content of the workshop

Day 1 - Project nodes presentations / Research design & ethics

Morning objective: Share key basic information about each node and their case studies, including what they aim to achieve within the scope of the project and how.

Afternoon objective: Undertake a collective reflection to discuss what underlies the methods we choose by identifying and articulating several elements such as positionality, political stance, and research design for collaborative projects.

0. Welcome and introductions
We initiated the workshop with a welcome to UNAM, a brief round of introductions, and an icebreaker activity (in Zoom and in the garden for the in-person participants). We then delved into some logistics announcements and presented the *Agreements of conviviality/co-existence* in order to establish clear expectations and conduct agreements for promoting mutual respect, understanding and cooperation during the workshop.
   Agreements of conviviality:
   - People online, please rename yourselves and add the name of your node.
   - Be aware of your microphones so that they are turned on only when you are addressing the meeting.
   - Please note we're not all native English speakers, let's strive to communicate clearly & articulately.
   - Speak loud enough to ensure everyone can hear.
   - Contribute actively to achieve the objectives within the designated timeframe.
   - Keep your interventions brief to allow time for everyone to participate.
   - Show respect for the opinions of others & embrace plurality.
   - Consent on pictures/videos
   - On-line participants will have the priority when questions and comments arise.

I. Nodes sharing
The objective of this first activity was to recall what other nodes are doing/plan to do and elicit their desired transformation(s).
Each node prepared and presented the following:
   - Brief description of: name of node-project, team members (roles and the institutions they work for), challenge(s) to be addressed
   - Hypothesis of transformation (what is the desired/expected transformation in your project?) and/or what is the process you have followed to construct yours?
   - Research design (concise strategy to address hypothesis) and main methods

II. Introduction to a reflexivity space
Rationale: Our scientific practice is underpinned by a set of elements that make up our work ethos. Some of such elements are our *positionality* (who we are and how it influences our

practice and outcomes), *research ethics* (the way we do science), *political stance* (how we envision social inequality and injustice and deal with them in our practice), *research design* (how we craft our research practice so that it is coherent with our work ethos and delivers appropriate social-ecological outcomes). An issue that is particularly important and crosscuts all these elements is how we identify and deal with asymmetric power relationships between us and the rest of the people involved in our research practice so that we do not reproduce them further and, ideally, can blur them as much as possible and empower disempowered social agents. Thus, before immediately delving into methods, we started the afternoon of day 1 by facilitating a <u>reflexivity space</u>, an essential component of PAR/TD processes, to collectively reflect on these elements that determine how we work and with which methods. To introduce such space, we asked participants the following 5 questions:
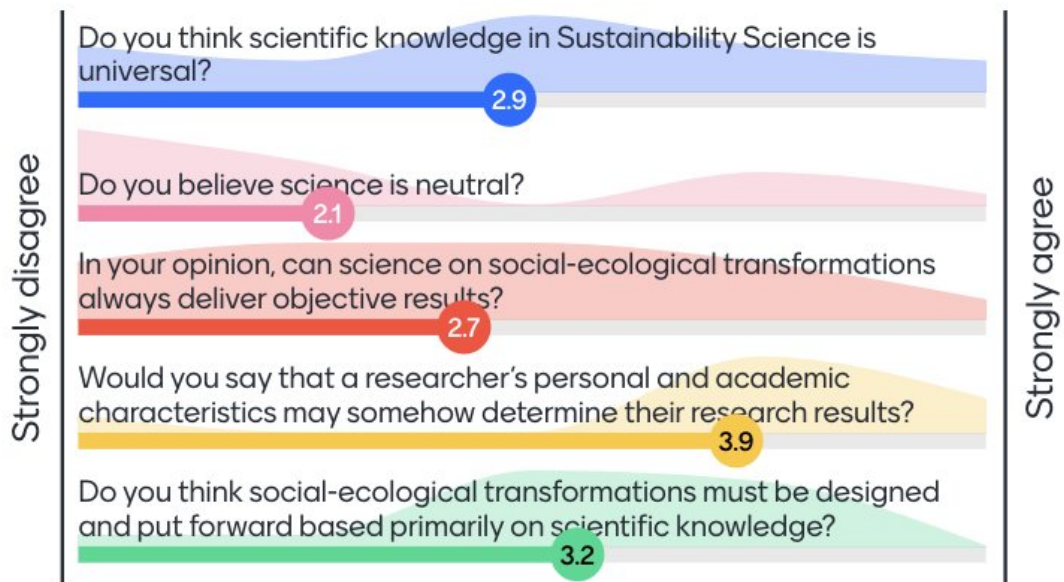
III. Activity - Rivers of life *(Umbela activity)*
The main objective of this activity was to reflect on our professional trajectories and the events that have led us to pursue transdisciplinary or participatory action research and pathways towards transformative research.

IV. Reflexivity space (cont.)
We continued discussing what underlies the methods we choose when identifying and articulating positionality, political stance, and research design for collaborative projects. Some guiding questions associated with this rationale are: *1) What is my role in my node and my main motivation for working towards fostering a transformation?; 2) What makes our research different from traditional research?; 3) What is our work ethics (from each node and, perhaps in the future as a research network) on transformation processes and transdisciplinary research?; 4) What is the aspiration of each node, and what are the possible pathways of change and challenges associated?*
Some of the concepts included in the presentation were:

Positionality - Who we are in terms of nationality, class, race, ethnicity, caste, gender; What are our personal and professional backgrounds and how these influence the way we see the world and limit alternative understandings; How we perceive ourselves in relation to our role in academia and the people we work with; What is our motivation to do science and why is this important for engaging in a research endeavor.
The way in which an individual's social location, identity, and experiences shape their perspective and knowledge.

Reflexivity - A set of mutually interrelated processes and practices involving the reflexive thinking, doing, and evaluating of qualitative research. Reflexivity is underpinned by our epistemological assumptions, which in term are determined by our beliefs and values. Therefore, reflexivity is key to understanding our positionality and the partiality of our knowledge and cognitive limits, and also to unveiling and making explicit our subjectivity and biases.
Reflexivity in research involves reflection on self, process, and representation, and critically examining power relations and politics in the research process, and researcher accountability in data collection and interpretation.

Research ethics - Principles and guidelines to govern the conduct of research involving human and non-human beings.

Political stance vs neutrality of science - From the concept of ¨positioning¨ which refers to the deliberate strategies or practices used by individuals or groups to present themselves in a particular way in order to achieve certain goals or to exert power and influence.
Doing science *for* and *with* the people is a political stance that subverts the idea that science is a 'neutral' endeavor; it means taking a political stance and designing our research practice in a way that helps making visible and giving voice to those social agents that are negligible and dispensable for the State and the market.

Research design - A plan or strategy that is developed to answer a research question or hypothesis.
In our case, we would like to for example discuss participatory vs. collaborative research - Problems with the idea of participatory research (e.g., the tyranny of participation, the ladder of participation), vs. collaboration as a more horizontal approach in research and prospects for the pursuit of decolonial science.

We concluded day 1 with an unstructured collective reflection in the garden.

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Day 2 - Transformative methods and tools exchanges

Morning objective - Exchange methodological challenges and learnings (i.e., creative solutions) of each node.

Afternoon objective - Broaden everyones' toolkit and reflect on the relationship between possible methods and transdisciplinary research principles, and focus on one transformative futures' method to strengthen group capacities.

I. Policy analysis - Sumit Vij made a presentation on the SPIRIT (Scalability, Power sensitive inclusivity, Reflexivity, Institutional flexibility, and Temporality) framework for policy assessment. The presentation focused on characterising and explaining if transformation is part of the policy documents in various case countries. The presentation and the general framework aim to initiate the conversation between the cases and identify possibilities to develop the SPIRIT framework further and assess case-specific policies.

II. Braintrust activity
Both the Brainstrust activity, and the following one (the Methods Bazaar) had as ultimate goal to foster the formations of a stronger community of practice, centered on supporting each other in challenges taking advantage of our collective wisdoms, teaching each other methods we know, being critical/reflexive of our own/others' methods, and expanding our methods towards visionary and transformative futures.

The braintrust activity had four parts: 1) introduction to the processing/principles, 2) presenting node described their project, challenge, and feedback they were looking for, 3) discussion by participants with a facilitator (Mexico node facilitated each brainstrust), 4) presenting node described their reflects on suggestions and feedback, either outline action items or new problems/context they now want to consider.
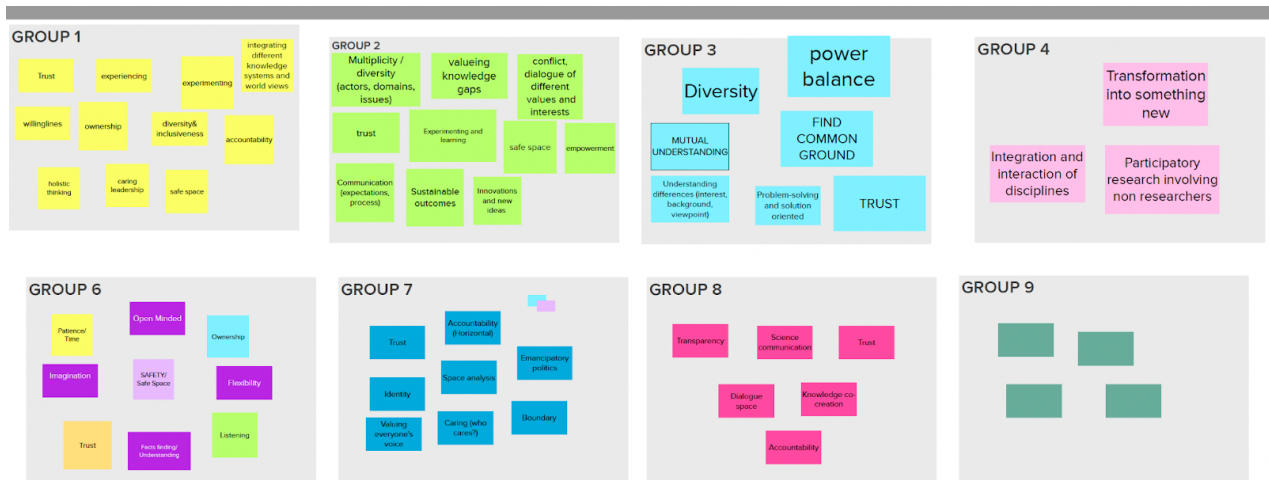We ran 2 rounds of 2 simultaneous sessions. Non-presenting nodes self-selected which braintrust they wished to attend one week beforehand. Presenting nodes prepared a briefing document or statement for the braintrust attendees to reflect on before arriving.

III. Methods Bazaar activity
Each node presented 1 method used (or plan to use) in their case study, and discussed how the method reflects or contradicts with the transdisciplinary research principles defined in the inception workshop and expanded on from the previous day (copied below). Some key questions were: *Are we building trust and being careful with our methods? Will they achieve academic products or something larger? Is there a risk of being extractivist with these tools, and if so how can we mitigate?*

We used the World Cafe format, in three rounds. Participants started at one of the tables (any they were interested in) and stayed for 15 minutes, and then moved to the other table. Methods shared here included PhotoVoice, and Cooperation-for-Added-value (CoAdd). Slides of the methods shared during the World Cafe are collected on the project workshop folder.

After the World Cafe, we had a plenary discussion with everyone about what people learned and which methods they were most excited about to use in transdisciplinary work, and why.

GROUP 1
Trust · experiencing · experimenting · integrating different knowledge systems and world views · willingness · ownership · diversity & inclusiveness · accountability · holistic thinking · caring leadership · safe space

GROUP 2
Multiplicity / diversity (actors, domains, issues) · valueing knowledge gaps · conflict, dialogue of different values and interests · trust · Experimenting and learning · safe space · empowerment · Communication (expectations, process) · Sustainable outcomes · Innovations and new ideas

GROUP 3
power balance · Diversity · MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING · FIND COMMON GROUND · Understanding differences (interest, background, viewpoint) · Problem-solving and solution oriented · TRUST

GROUP 4
Transformation into something new · Integration and interaction of disciplines · Participatory research involving non researchers

GROUP 6
Patience/ Time · Open Minded · Ownership · Imagination · SAFETY/ Safe Space · Flexibility · Trust · Facts finding/ Understanding · Listening

GROUP 7
Accountability (Horizontal) · Trust · Emancipatory politics · Space analysis · Identity · Valuing everyone's voice · Caring (who cares?) · Boundary

GROUP 8
Transparency · Science communication · Trust · Dialogue space · Knowledge co-creation · Accountability

GROUP 9

For examples of how to reflect on and/or present a method are here at this youtube channel-
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI8qkz1i11ORShUtF8FZ0IQA-qYNacaea
And in this methods library-
https://steps-centre.org/method-repository/?_categories=vignettes

IV. Imaginaries of Transformative Futures
The Mexico City Node briefly presented and facilitated a fraction of a transformative futures' method, the Manoa Mashup method. This method was adapted from the Mānoa scenario method (which was designed to generate divergent, surprising scenarios that evolve from changes and impacts proliferating over several decades -see for example: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/275338406_Manoa_The_future_is_not_binary). An identified gap in the sustainability literature is a lack of explorations of potentially desirable futures that could emerge if humanity were to effect sustainable transformations (Bennett et al. 2016). Hence, "the Mānoa Mash-up Method is an adaptation of the original Mānoa scenarios method combined with Futures / Foresight tools such as the Three Horizons Framework and participative experiential futuring. It is an innovative Futures/Foresight workshop process that uses seeds to create scenarios that are hopeful, positive and inspiring, and produces richer and more complex stories and visions of the futures than simplistic utopian narratives (https://www0.sun.ac.za/cst/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Manoa-Report-Digital.pdf)". During this activity, participants constructed Future Wheels, one of the first steps that this method entails (the adapted method comprises the articulation with the 3-Horizons framework).

Certain guiding questions to facilitate the reflection on these topics are (taken from Almendra Cremaschi): *1) Whose futures are we dreaming of?; 2) How to bring voices that are not present?; 3) How do we, as facilitators, navigate biases?; 4) How do we dream about futures without being naive, but considering and departing from existing power relations and injustices?*

We concluded day 2 with an unstructured collective reflection in the garden.
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Day 3 - Field trip to urban wetland

Objective - Experience hands-on activities for promoting relationality, as they provide opportunities for individuals to engage with others and the world around them in a more embodied, experiential way.

I. Visit to Xochimilco Wetland

In this field trip we visited an urban agricultural wetland within Mexico City that is also the study site of the Mexico node. We took a trip in a typical boat of the area called *trajinera* and during the trip, we talked about the most relevant issues related to this wetland that have to do with its history and the problems it is currently facing (e.g., environmental degradation due to population and urban growth). After the *trajinera* ride, we arrived at a *chinampa*, which is the name given to each piece of land surrounded by water in the wetland for agricultural production. This chinampa is where the NGO REEDUCA works through their project "Chinampas in movement", which seeks to reactivate the production of the ancestral chinampas through an agroecological, sustainable, and shared responsibility model, to improve the chinampa ecosystem, raising awareness of the natural, cultural and food security value, contributing to the local economic development of Mexico City. We participated in some hands-on activities in the chinampa to know in detail the agricultural practices that characterize the chinampas. In these activities REEDUCA's colleagues guided us and explained the methods for obtaining mud for seeding, planting, and harvesting.

II. Correspondence practices *(Umbela activity)*:

This activity of correspondence practices was proposed to give continuity to the workshop topics related to positionality and reflexivity. This is an introspective activity for *sentipensar* (a Spanish word with no English translation but it is an action that combines feeling or sensing and thinking) in which individuals explore their cognitions, emotions, motivations, and behaviors concerning a topic in question. The intent is to capture the ideas in a narrative (letter) to be sent to another person (the letter can be sent or simply kept for the individual as a one-on-one exercise). The general process of the activity is to create a quiet space for reflection; ask trigger questions while the participants have their eyes closed to place them in a specific place and/or time; stimulate the participants by listening to relaxing music or making them touching objects (e.g. a bowl with water, stones, leaves, etc.) to make the experience immersive; once the immersive reflection process is over, participants are asked to write a letter to a colleague narrating what they thought and reflected. The main objective of this activity for the group was to reflect individually on how we perceive our roles within our case studies, what relationships we have established, either with the ecosystem itself or with people related to it, and what motivates, challenges and disappoints us in our case study and of these relationships. The triggered questions for the reflection where: *What emotions does water generate in me? How do I relate to water in the place I am working on? How do my emotions flow with my professional environment in the Trans Path Plan project? How do I feel now?*

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Day 4 - Workshop harvest and next steps

Objective - Explore possibilities of convergence between case studies and delineate concrete next steps and outcomes for the project.

I. Updates, wrap-up and next steps
The purpose of the first session of this final workshop day was to reflect on workshop findings and experiences in light of the ongoing and planned activities at the project level, for the Trans-Path-Planning project. Specific attention and space was given to the post-graduate researchers, at PhD and postdoc level. Ideas shared for this included:

- Meetings among postdoc and PhD students, amongst themselves.
- Joint work between nodes, around an indicator framework for transformative work, SPIRIT Policy Assessment framework, a one week writing workshop for these or other activities, more repetition of the Braintrust sessions around PhD/postdoc challenges, opening up webinars and lectures to outside participants and opening up lectures and (online) courses of project partners to project participants. For some of these activities we may want to look for additional funding or mobility grants to supplement project budgets.
- The project website was presented by the IIT Guwahati team. And a request was made to all partners to make sure all team members were listed in the project contact folder on GoogleDrive.
- The project Comms Team presented proposals and plans for further communication activities, especially Blogs and Podcasts. Also, they were requested to facilitate if bi-monthly project newsletter. Planning for the comms team activities and the inputs for those from all partners would be further elaborated.

The workshop became a platform of mutual learning and exchanges, enhancing our dialogues and building network capacity. Not only did we familiarize ourselves with the peculiar challenges and best practices in each node, but we also explored different methodologies and research designs together. Resultantly, we found avenues of opportunities across nodes and ways to bridge research gaps via our field trip.

Transdisciplinarity and transformative research designs became the common ground upon which we also incorporated working inputs from Postdocs and PhD researchers. We have managed to conduct the monthly learning webinar series regularly. These webinars have certainly enriched us with understanding each node's nuances.

By the end of the workshop, we finalized a few expected outcomes in the near future. The communication teams will take the lead on handling our social media pages, podcast production and publishing blog posts. Each node is also expected to share its activities regularly for seamless communication and synergy for our project. This happens in our monthly global team meetings and is expected to shape up further in coordination with the communications team. Overall, the workshop managed to strike a healthy balance in advancing both Stream 1 and Stream 2 objectives that were set out for our annual workshop.
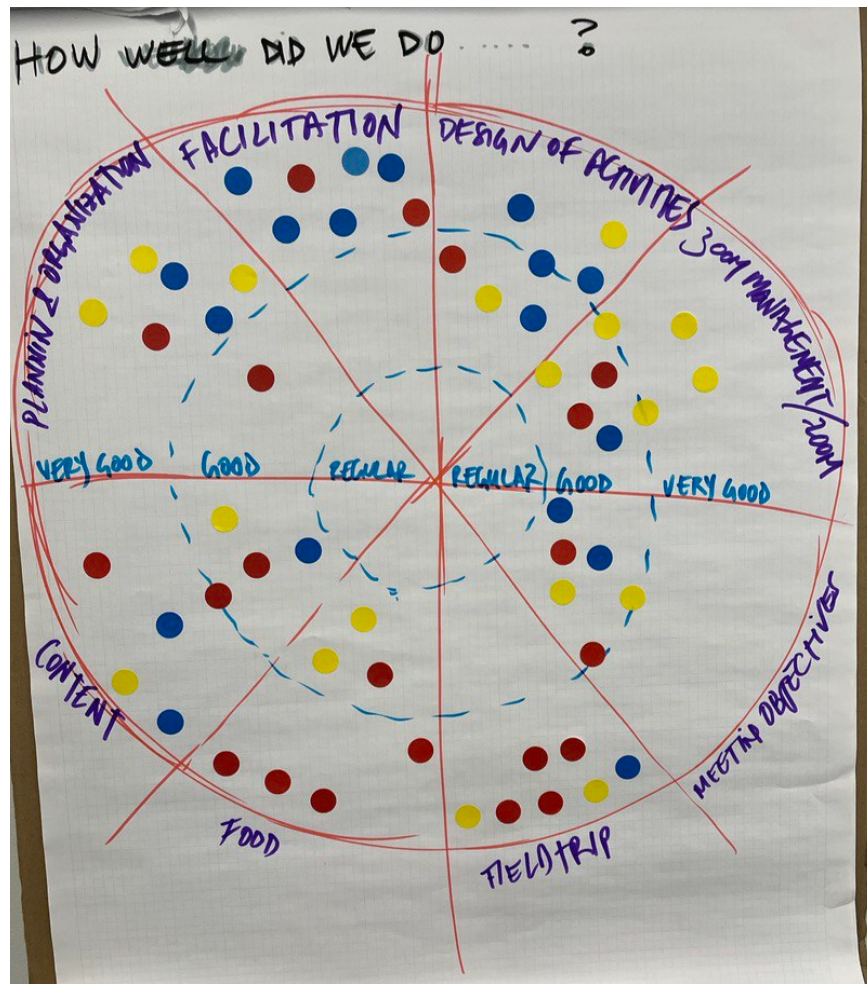
II. Q-Methodology (*Umbela presentation and exercise)*

The aim of this exercise was to get to know the basics of the method and discuss the possibility of using it to contribute to the cross-learning among the nodes in the project.

The ultimate aim of implementing this method is to analyze (over the 5 years of the project) changes in the way the TPP group conceptualizes frameworks and methodologies related to non-traditional forms of research (i.e. transdisciplinary, participatory action research) and how these possible changes in narratives can lead to reconfigurations in the relationships, actions, capacities and social networks of the participants.

III. Workshop evaluation

We use an "evaluation target" tool that is useful in workshops to graphically observe the opinions that participants had during the workshop on different aspects of it. In this case we evaluated the organization and planning, the facilitation, the design of the activities, the management of the hybrid meeting (with face-to-face and online participants), the content, the food, the field trip and the fulfillment of the objectives. After the evaluation, there was a group reflection on the results. For example, it was commented that with respect to the fulfillment of the objectives, the evaluation was low because due to aspects beyond the group's control there was not much participation on the part of the online attendees (due to time differences). We concluded the workshop with an unstructured collective reflection focused on the participants' feedback.

[Workshop methods compendium](#)

Trans-Path-Plan: Water Transformation Pathways Planning - Mexico City International Workshop

Annex I. Agenda

DAY 1

Time	Activity	Objective
9:00 - 9:15	- Welcome to UNAM - Brief introductions	Getting to know each other
9:15 - 9:40	- Icebreaker activity (separated zoom/in person)	Getting to know each other
9:40 - 10:00	- Logistics announcements (wifi, recording sessions, security indications, etc.) - Review agenda and objectives of the workshop - Agreements of conviviality/co-existence (online and in person, ej, re-name in zoom: name+node) - Blog	Establish clear expectations and conduct agreements for promoting mutual respect, understanding and cooperation during the workshop.
10:00 - 11:30	Nodes presentations Round 1: 1) Mekong; 2) Brahmaputra; 3) Kingwal-Yala; 4) Nile	Recall what other nodes are doing/plan to do and elicit their

	15+5 min each	desired transformation(s).
11:30 - 12:00	*Coffee break*	
12:00 - 13:00	Nodes presentations Round 2: 1) Gezira; 2) Wadden; 3) Xochi. 15+5 min each	Recall what other nodes are doing/plan to do and elicit their desired transformation(s).
13:00 - 13:30	Intro to the reflexive space -Positionality-positioning-research ethics & design- (mentimeter + intro)	Introduce a space to start thinking about what underlies the methods we choose by identifying and articulating positionality, political stance, and research design for collaborative projects.
13:30 - 14:30	*Lunch*	
14:30 - 15:00	Rivers of Life	Reflect on our professional trajectories and the events that have led us to pursue transdisciplinary or participatory action research and pathways toward transformative research.
15:00 - 16:30	Reflexive space cont… -Positionality-positioning-research ethics & design-	Undertake a collective reflection to discuss what underlies the methods we choose by identifying and articulating positionality, political stance, and research design for collaborative projects.
16:30 - 17:00	Wrap-up / conclusion	Share reflections and learnings.

DAY 2

Time	Activity	Objective
9:00 - 9:10	Zoom set up, remainder of agenda and agreements	-
9:10 - 9:35	Policy analysis	
9:35 - 9:45	Introduction to Braintrust (Act.1)	Build a community of practice and support and foster creativity and alternative perspectives on our largest anticipated or current challenges.
9:50 - 10:35	Sala 1. Nile (main room) Sala 2. Mekong (second room)	-

10:40 - 11:25	Sala 1. Brahmaputra (main room)	-
11:30 - 11:55	*Coffee break*	
12:00 - 12:50	Sala 1. Kingwal-Yala (main room) Sala 2. Wadden (second room)	-
12:50 - 13:30	Collective reflection	Form a stronger community of practice, centered on supporting each other in challenges, taking advantage of our collective wisdoms.
13:30 - 14:30	*Lunch*	
14:30 - 16:00	Methods Bazaar (Act. 2)	Broaden everyones' toolkit and reflect on the relationship between possible methods and transdisciplinary research principles. Teaching each other methods we know, being critical/reflexive of our own/others' methods.
16:00 - 17:00	Transformative futures' method: Mānoa mash-up method (Act. 3)	Expanding our methods towards visionary and transformative futures, and fostering capacity building on emancipatory and realistic futures pathways by focusing on one transformative futures' method: The MANOA method
17:00 - 17:15	Wrap-up / conclusion	-

DAY 3

Time	Activity	Objective
8:00 - 9:00	Transportation hotel-wetland	-
9:00 - 10:30	Boat trip, explanation of the wetland social-ecological context	To know the history, relevance and problems of the agricultural and urban wetland.
10:30 - 11:30	Visit to a chinampa - explanation of chinampa production and hands-on activities	Experience hands-on activities for promoting relationality, as these provide opportunities for individuals to engage with others and the world around them in a more embodied, experiential way.

11:30 - 12:15	Correspondence practices: Sentipensando el humedal de Xochimilco (Sentipensing the Xochimilco wetland)	Reflect individually on how we perceive our roles within our case study, what relationships we have established (either with the ecosystem itself or with people related to it), and what motivates, challenges, and disappoints us in our case study and of these relationships.
12:15 - 13:15	*Lunch*	
13:15 - 14:45	Return to main land on boat Reflections of day 3	-
14:45 -16:00	Transportation wetland site - hotel	-
18.30/19.00 -	Informal gathering - drinks and bites in Mexican terrace	-

DAY 4

Time	Activity	Objective
9:00 - 10:00	Project outputs discussion	Co-define concrete next steps for each node and for the overall project
10:00 - 11:00	Next steps for comms team / learning team	Learn about the progress in each team and the next steps
11:00 - 11:30	*Coffee break*	
11:30 - 12:45	Stream 2 - Q-Methodology	Analyze over the 5 years of the project, changes in the way the TPP group conceptualizes frameworks and methodologies related to non-traditional forms of research (i.e. transdisciplinary, participatory action research) and how these possible changes in narratives can lead to reconfigurations in the relationships, actions, capacities and social networks of the participants.
12:45 - 13:30	Collective evaluation of workshop	-
13:30 - 14:30	*Lunch*	
14:30	Return to hotel	-