

## Annex to T2S 2020 workshop report: Participant feedback (condensed)

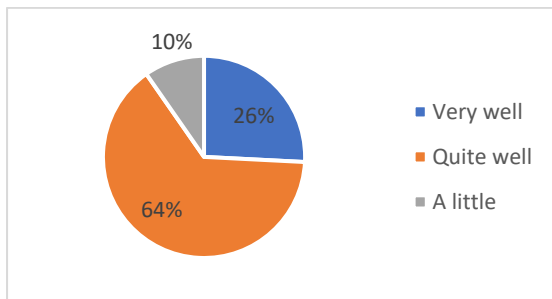
v. 19 June 2020

Of 31 respondents, two attended only one or two of the five sessions, while 29 attended between three and five sessions.

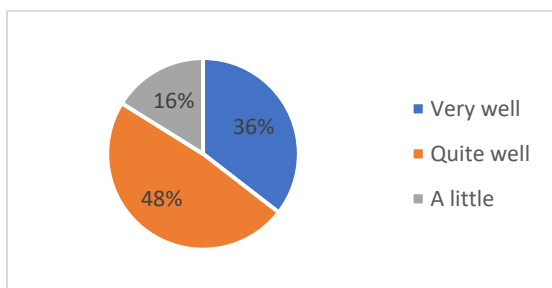
### Substance of the workshop

#### How well did the workshop achieve its goals?

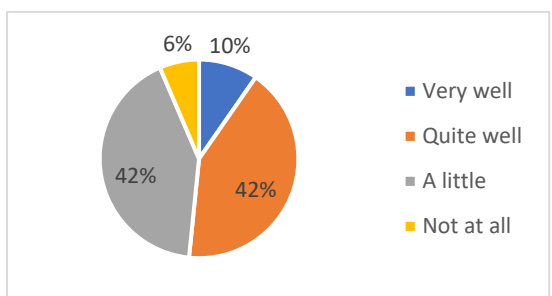
Goal 1: To learn about what the projects are learning about the politics of doing engaged research on transformations to sustainability



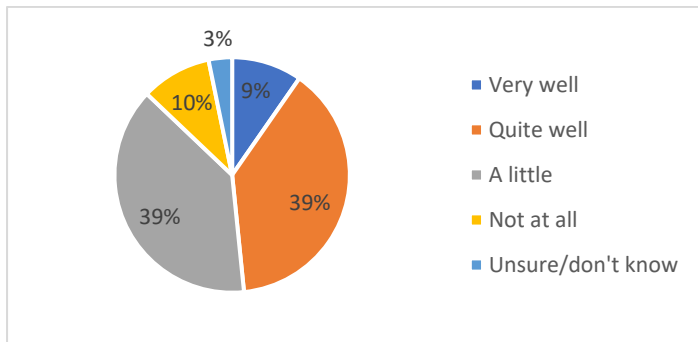
Goal 2: To self-assess progress so far, at project and programme levels



Goal 3: To strengthen connections between the projects

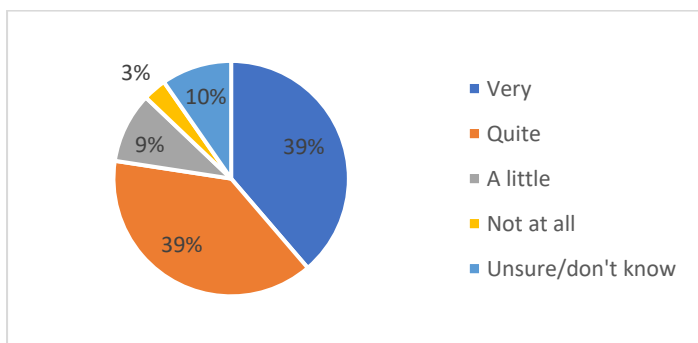


Goal 4: To develop a perspective and plans for programme-level activities and engagement

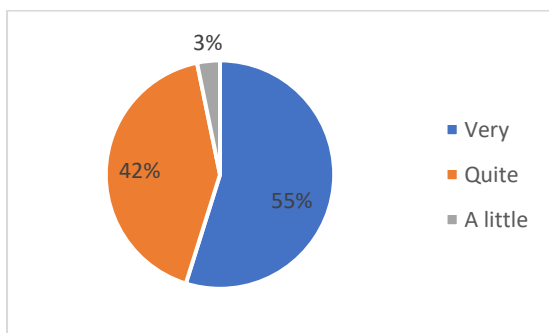


How interesting or useful were the following workshop elements for you?

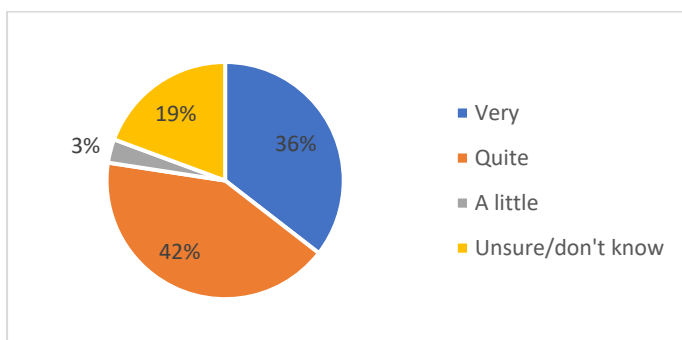
Keynote talk by Giuseppe Feola



Project presentations

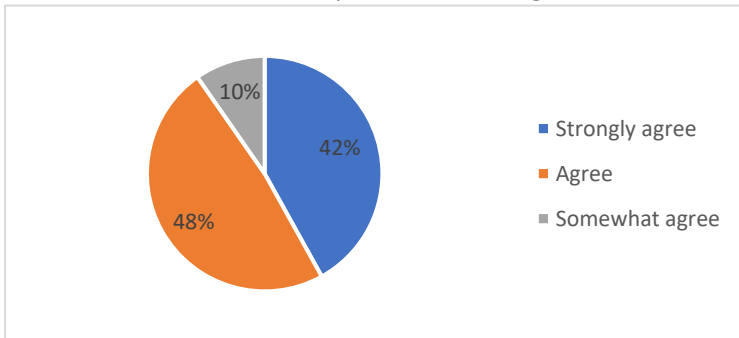


Final session, with break-out groups discussing topics: Theory, Methodology, Ethics, Policy/Action

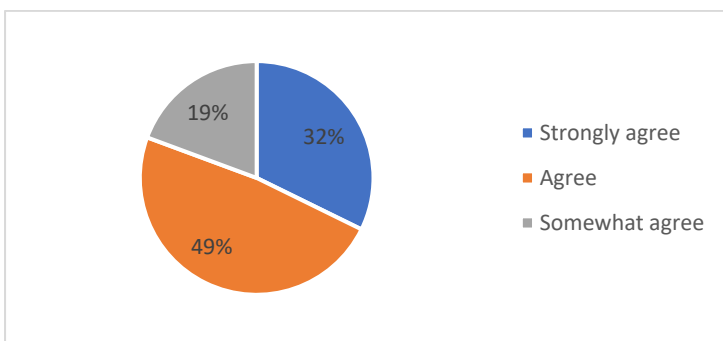


**Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.**

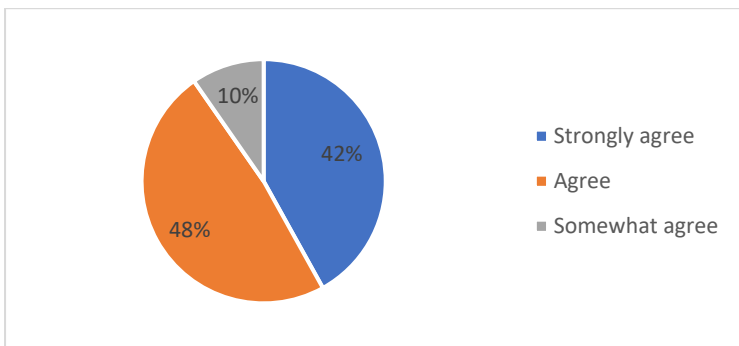
On the whole, the workshop was interesting and informative



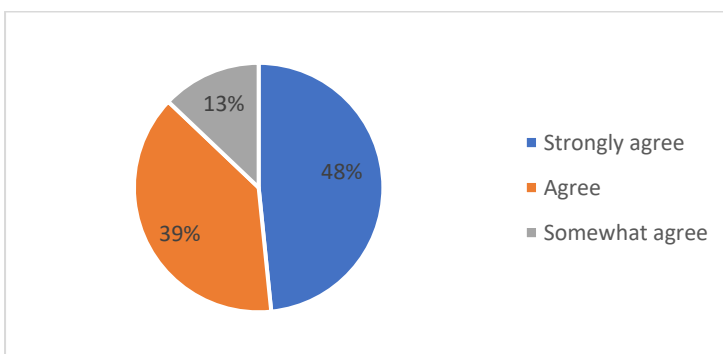
The questions and answers received from the attendees and presenters were useful.



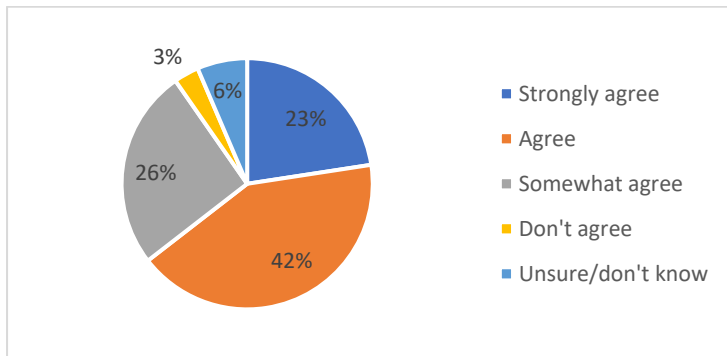
I am motivated to engage in discussion and exchange with other T2S projects



I would be willing to attend other virtual events in the framework of the T2S programme



I would be willing to contribute to (help design, speak in) other virtual events in the framework of the T2S programme



## What one or two things did you learn through the workshop that were particularly meaningful or useful to you?

### *Sharing and learning from other projects' conceptual and methodological approaches and experiences*

- Having the opportunity to get insight into how other projects are addressing issues and commonalities and differences is really helpful/stimulating. Having structured opportunities for interaction was useful.
- The break-out sessions truly helped relieve some anxieties about the challenges and limitations we have faced in our own projects by hearing similar experiences from other projects and finding some directions through these discussions.
- Was useful to hear about other project's rescheduling and reorganising in light of COVID.
- The workshop offered interesting insights on how different methods are being used to study transformations and adapt to COVID-19 in various sites. I would really like to follow up on this aspect and engage with other project teams.
- COVID-19 is affecting all projects and a fast and well-coordinated solution for the program as a whole is needed.

### *The concept of transformation and its operationalization*

- Transformation is a contested concept and deserves more discussion across projects.
- That all projects struggle with the term 'transformation' and how to measure progress in transformation.
- How local people perceive the induced transformations of these initiatives in a sustainability perspective.
- I found that each project under the umbrella project is trying to find definitions and various ways to attain 'sustainability' and 'transformations'. [...] The insights shared by all speakers raise more questions related to 'what', 'why' and 'how' in terms of polity, policy, actions, grassroots engagements, understanding various externalities, etc.
- It is somehow comforting and also energizing to see how all the projects seem to be similarly 'struggling' with how they perceive and define transformation and how they and their projects contribute to it. Good to see there is also openness about the tensions around that.
- Many projects are taking a very grounded approach and focussing on transformative changes at micro-scales, then trying to draw generalisations to wider processes. This is highly appropriate for some. But it seems there is less focus on global political economy or other processes analysed at other scales - e.g. transnational cooperation, role of the nation state, international trade or others.
- The way we all grapple with local level complexities and contradictions in relation to global and sometimes abstract transformation processes.
- Different ways in which people were looking at transformation. I really liked the idea of making and unmaking.
- I thought especially useful the speech of Giuseppe Feola, presenting the idea about the disruption of capitalism in terms of 'unmaking'.
- I like the idea of the keynote on 'making' and 'unmaking', and how this was taken up again in other presentations afterwards. It appears to be a useful concept in relation to the above question of how you contribute to transformation and how - both in discourse and practices - you are part of making and unmaking certain processes and ideas.

- For me, what was most interesting is to note how much thinking about 'transformations to sustainability' forcefully and often normatively mobilizes binaries – between sustainable and unsustainable, between making and unmaking, between 'superficial' (additive) and more transformative forms of change etc. – often without making the effort to clearly explain these terms, and without explaining how the difference between the two sides of the binary can be 'seen' empirically.
- I found the efforts to make visible the invisible a notable cross-cutting issue. It plays maybe an undervalued part in launching, motivating or sustaining transformational changes. I also often found some of the projects not critical enough in their thinking, and that is important to note and work to stimulate more.

### *The position of the researcher*

- The importance of the ontological-epistemological perspectives of the researchers for the approach and the (political) positioning of the envisaged social science contribution to T2S.
- I also started to think deeper about the positionality of researchers.

### *Stakeholder engagement*

- Difficulty of achieving stakeholder engagement that also results in quality research.
- The concept of 'engagement at a distance'.
- Seeing the shared struggles but also responses of projects on stakeholder participation, especially for marginal/vulnerable groups. Realizing the impact of the digital divide on sustainability transformations in the Covid-19 world.

## Workshop organization

### What worked well or less well in the workshop?

#### Well

- The fact as many people could participate from projects as wanted to.
- Zoom – for giving a sense of the audience to the presenters, and for allowing break-out rooms.
- The break-out groups – for interactivity and deeper discussions.
- Collecting written questions in the Q&A instead of directly asking questions was efficient.
- The google sheet – useful for staying connected beyond the period of the workshop sessions.
- Short session times (1.5 - 2 hrs), with a relatively short and focused agenda.

#### Less well

- The lack of chance encounters and informal interaction that spark ideas and collaboration.
- GoToWebinar platform:
  - Can't see the audience
  - More questions would have come through the stream if we could have been inspired by each other's questions.
- Difficulty of engaging audience and staying concentrated online. (E.g. 'Difficult to concentrate on PowerPoints. But as a teacher myself I don't see good alternatives to this format.')
- The short time for presentations and discussion (of both the projects and cross-project issues).
- Time management was not in favour of the last presenters.
- We could have come better prepared to the break-out group.
- The internet connection sometimes interrupted participation in the webinar.
- The continuous changes in timings.
- Difficult for participants outside Europe because of timing.

### In general, with virtual meetings, I would prefer:



## Suggestions as to how future virtual meetings could be done differently/better.

### Timing

- Longer time for discussion.
- A longer Q&A session for those who are interested and have time to stay online.
- If there are future meetings, there should be a bit of a break. this was quite full on, also with the organising, though great.

### Interactivity

- Maybe improve the dynamic and interaction between the presenters.
- Option of having some 'coffee break' meeting rooms where you could walk in in some break-out-session (possible organised thematically - geographically -...).
- More break-out sessions and smaller, more focused discussions.

### Substance

- Have presentations that are connected to each other.
- Academics should learn to present their projects like a start-up pitch: 1. Problem - why should we care to listen? 2. How do they solve the problem? Purely describing academic work is boring and not very informative, especially for people who have no understanding of the field. But some projects did a very good presentation.
- Ask people to prepare something in advance, and invite particular people to respond to this; have people systematically reflect on only one aspect of their project; work in smaller groups on some collaborative output.
- We need to think better about how virtuality can include real and in-depth exchanges between participants (in line with the terms used by most projects, not only sharing what we do but entering in a real and critical process of co-creation). This is something I think we are dealing with in the current COVID context. Maybe sessions targeting very specific targets, avoiding a too general discussion as a whole. Maybe analysing cases/situations from one specific project collectively (which would include sharing some materials previously) could be an option. This could be done in smaller groups targeting only on specific, concrete elements that resonates with the broader issues we are dealing with.
- Doing a pre-symposium survey to gather and use participants' expectations.
- Some interesting exercises can be designed to make researchers from different projects think together on a common issue.
- Asking people to prepare well – with very specific instructions.
- Better focused (short) sessions. This would probably also require some a priori identification and structuring of issues to be discussed. The load of information about the different projects and the differences in terminology and framing are quite large which makes it difficult to really know what we are talking about.

### Other

- Automatic translators in other languages (French, Spanish, etc.) to facilitate better hearing for everyone.



## Looking ahead

### Are there any topics that you think have potential for cross-project collaboration?

- The four topics identified for breakout groups were good and could be taken forward for cross-project collaboration
- Projects can be grouped based on 2 criteria: "social sustainability" & "environmental sustainability". These aspects of sustainability can be discussed separately by assessing how each project contributes to each of the sustainability dimensions.
- Solidarity
- Dealing with power differences in multi-stakeholder settings.
- On methodology, how to facilitate co-generation of knowledge process.
- For instance: how we envision and implement processes of co-creation of knowledge? With what stakeholders do we engage and how? How to deal with policy incidence in a war that is context-time specific? Could we design a shared vision of some elements (for instance can we develop a shared vision of what is transformation? are there some common methodological aspects (action research? participatory research?)
- Identity and well-being of the communities in the research sites.
- More discussions on Climate Change Adaptation and how each project contributes to it.
- Issues of policy and action – its objectives, methods, and challenges, roles of transdisciplinary and transboundary groups of researchers – have immense potential for cross-learning across projects. As the COSUST special issue is aiming to bring together the theory and analytical frameworks, there is potential for compiling and developing methods for action.
- For 'Truepath' and 'T2GS': considering micro-financing and local institutions as important factors that control and challenge the longevity of groundwater resource in project villages.
- The topic of 'transformation' is of course one that keeps coming up, and that's currently ongoing in the COSUST special issue (with possibility to have webinar/discussion on that?).
- How to deal with COVID + how that makes the topics we work on even more relevant? (including the tension of how some partners might instead be less focused on more radical transformation now and rather be in a survival modus, which again brings the tension/question of what norms we bring in as researchers on transformation...).
- Methods and ethics of transformative research.
- Conflicts, governance and access to water. This theme could link all the projects that touch somehow the water governance issue. It could embrace, for example, issues about groundwater, floods and water pollution, that are central themes in some of the T2S projects.
- Regional perspective, comparison across sectors (water, forestry, mining, agroecology), spatial analysis (land-use change), engagement methods.
- Conducting research with different theoretical lenses, sharing insights in case studies.
- Stakeholder representation (in politically contested environments).
- Dealing with the digital divide in Covid-19 world.
- The topics like Gold Matters: Sustainability Transformations in Gold Mining, TRUEPATH: Transforming unsustainable pathways in agricultural frontiers, and SecTenSusPeace: Localizing land-registration in conflict-affected areas have potential for cross-project collaboration. In certain regions of the DRC these three themes interact and could lead to a new axis of collaborative research.

- How to distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' changes, esp. when accepting that these distinctions are themselves always also ideological-political.
- Community complexities and local contradictions.
- The politics of knowledge (co)-creation and its consequence for the positioning and the role of social science researchers in the (democratic) governance of T2S.
- Collaborations in writing across early career researchers from different project separately would be interesting.
- Messages for dialogues with politicians.

### **Do you have suggestions for transversal webinar topics?**

- Following up on break-out group topics and discussions.
- Defining social sustainability.
- The role of the researcher in transformation to sustainability research
- Comparison of agricultural practices, institutions in global south and global north. Case studies from East on sustainability.
- Methods
- Discussing the main methodologies used in the all T2S programs.
- Ethics
- Covid-19 and transformation; national politics and local transformations; transformation under capitalism
- Trans- and interdisciplinary case research: making sense of complex data

### **Apart from webinars, what else could the programme coordination team do to add value to the work of the projects?**

- It's really helpful having comms support, even small things help like the Tweets during the workshop / mobilising people to write blogs on a theme and being able to post on the webpage...vehicles for communication that can then be used by projects with their stakeholders...
- Collaborative writing / publishing
- Maybe auditing can be an idea. It could help project leaders understand & gain responsibility about their role and research quality.
- Speed talks
- Developing docket of cross-project learnings and initiating blogs
- The group of researchers in this programme is a wonderful network to be a part of. Programme level engagements within this group has truly helped us think through our own projects more clearly. Opportunity to interact with this group more frequently will help strengthen the network as well as help with our own project directions.
- Notifications via emails about articles, case studies published on Belmont Forum's website.
- Would there be a possibility to organise a network of reviewing or 'friendly fire'? For instance to share ongoing papers for early review/comments/suggestions? If that needs to be limited somehow, it can possibly focus on the work of early-career researchers?
- Could the coordination team help us to meet and engage with project members beyond the PIs and the presenters?

- The coordination team could encourage the communication between the T2S projects by opening a virtual space in which the T2S programmes could exchange experiences and have a easy channel for communication.
- Offer joint publication opportunities which are open enough for all projects to participate.
- Ensure that the projects will get an extension (not only time-wise but also with adequate funds), to cope with the COVID-19 vagaries.
- Site with basic literature on transformation (2-3 articles) fed by each project; regular self-organized meetings (every 4 months?) across project leaders to discuss progress and eventual collaborations.
- As with the COVID-theme, have every 3 month a specific topic and ask the projects to write about it, e.g. 1 opinion piece on gender equality, one on power structures, etc.

### **Any other comments on the workshop or the programme?**

- About projects with lack of focus on a specific sector: will there be any results?
- I think there are many more places for this programme to be heard. It should submit sessions to big conferences like AAAS or T2021, Adaptation Futures etc. It should set up a collaborative agreement with The Conversation to have its blogs and outputs go further. And more strategic thinking about how to connect to high-level policy processes. Projects could be engaged in figuring this out, so tap their energy and expertise for that.
- I feel still that the natural scientists' contribution is poor. I perceive difficulties for real interdisciplinary activity among field environmental scientists and field social scientists.
- I did not find the workshop itself all that inspiring - primarily because I missed the interactions and the possibility of having chance encounters with members of other projects - but that was hardly because of how it was organized.
- A nice job in difficult circumstances. Good that some of the interactive, co-learning spirit of the Belmont initiative, starting in Japan, could be maintained in this way.