

Collaborative practices at the science-society interface

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We know that a sustainable future will require our collective wisdom. We know it is more important now than ever to communicate and collaborate across difference. We know that we must somehow integrate our knowledge and ideas, while navigating the incongruities in our values and institutions. But what does this truly mean for how we conceptualize and practice sustainability research? Drawing from a suite of eclectic experiments in cross-disciplinary, community-based, and arts-based collaborations, I reflect on this question by repurposing the familiar framework of the scientific paper. “Introductions,” I argue, are the place for re-conceptualizing what the problem is, how the world works, and basic assumptions about knowledge and reality. “Methods” are where we experiment with new relationships among data, theories, and people; and strive for trust and reciprocity by exposing and overcoming our biases, hierarchies, and mutual incomprehension. “Results” may be unexpected: “failures” may prove to be avenues for deeper understanding, and the relationships built through collaboration may prove more valuable than solving the problem at hand. “Discussions” are where we analyze, package, and report on the significance of our work –but for who, and why? Why restrict ourselves to the scientific paper at all? Why not break away into theatre, games, or dance, where we can engage, and inspire, so many more? In “Conclusion,” transdisciplinary collaboration is like foreign travel: it is helpful to learn a bit of the language, be respectful, and come with gifts. It is an open-ended journey that will provoke acute questions about oneself and one’s work, and how both are implicated in the metamorphoses our world needs to achieve sustainability.