



The Social Nature of Global One Health

An analysis of life science and social science interactions within Wageningen University and Research's 2014-2018 investment theme: 'Global One Health'

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Background

Global One Health (GOH) was WUR's investment theme from the period 2014-2018. A total of nine projects were funded, of which this project was the concluding one.

Introduction

Supradisciplinary collaborations between social science (SS) and life science (LS) have seen many trends; it appears as such the topic is well alive and often subject to prescriptive ideas on how to tackle contemporary wicked problems, yet the extent to which research is operationalized supradisciplinarily still seems limited. How did Wageningen University and Research do with regards to the integration of SS and LS collaborations in its investment theme Global One Health? Were LS-SS integrations limited? Why? And where do opportunities lie?

Methods

An analysis of the projects' year reports was done, as well as conducting 10 interviews with scientists from both life sciences and social sciences (seven LS; three SS). Overarching themes were extracted after discussions with multiple researchers.

Results

The analysis of the year reports of the projects indicated that the extent to which GOH projects were supradisciplinary across LS and SS was fairly limited: merely one was interdisciplinary and five were multidisciplinary at best.



Figure 1. The most interesting or frequently mentioned constraining, facilitating, and undecided factors of the interviews

An analysis of the interviews yielded overarching themes that could be subdivided into three different categories: constraining factors, facilitating factors, and undecided factors, which can be seen in Figure 1. The latter category could belong either to the constraining or facilitating factors based on what perceptions one has of it.

Discussion

The Social Nature

It became clear from the interviews that interpersonal relations and everything inherent to those are pivotal for successful supradisciplinary collaborations.

The following statement on supradisciplinary collaborations between LS and SS from the interviews exemplifies the possible factors of value judgments as well as preferred practice:

*“Scientists are not necessarily busy trying to **solve things**; they are busy with generating knowledge. That is something different entirely. When you want to reach solutions, you need an integration of disciplines. For the development of knowledge, I do not need any social science, a bit simplistically said; but to take the knowledge and pour it into a solution, you probably do need social sciences.*

*I think this is the crux: what I like to do best is **generate knowledge.**”*

This quote could have any of multiple implications, ranging from the interviewee having a value judgment towards SS in the sense that SS would not independently produce knowledge, to the interviewee merely having a preference for working inside their own discipline, or that the interviewee does not perceive collectively created knowledge, as knowledge.

Recommendations

- **Alter the prevailing (self)image of SS** – the way SS are perceived both by LS and SS themselves are not contributing to smooth collaborations. Wicked problems are interlinked with the social domain, thus it is time to deem a higher appreciation of SS.
- **Use the knowledge available** – a plethora of information exists on how to effect efficient and pleasant supradisciplinary collaborations, however opportunities to put them to practice in daily life are not seized to the fullest.
- **Create space to experiment** – with pressure comes the avoidance of risks and thus unfamiliar terrain. Therefore, space needs to be created in order to let scientists experiment with one another, and to think critically about forming the research question of supradisciplinary projects.