

## Grounded action design – Transdisciplinary co-creation for better transformative processes

### Frameworks for transdisciplinary research #9

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A government or other political institution wanting to enact change often approaches the problem being addressed with specific perceptions and understandings. However, their approach is usually insufficient to capture the complexity of the “problem space”. Grounded action design is a framework for a reflexive and co-creative process where stakeholders, relevant experts and decision makers – guided by researchers from a scientific advisory organization – explore, map and expand their understanding of the complex problem space before the political institution or decision making body sets transformative change in train (figure 1). This framework is suitable for research organizations acting in a scientific advisory function (Bruhn et al. 2019).

Grounded action design, summarized in the figure, has four phases, each of which has specific aims and processes. The four phases are described sequentially, but in practice there will be iterations among them.

**1. Problem scoping:** An iterative process where all the stakeholders affected by the problem and the decision makers engage in dialogue to ensure that all aspects of the problem are considered. Potential con-

licts are identified and commitment of the stakeholders is established.

**2. Transformative mapping:** A participatory exploration to develop an overview of stakeholders, their positions, functions, and experiences, and how they are connected.

**3. Identifying stakeholder capacities, useful ideas, and possibilities for change:** Detailed inquiry to identify the potential for positive outcomes for the field of affected stakeholders through transformative change.

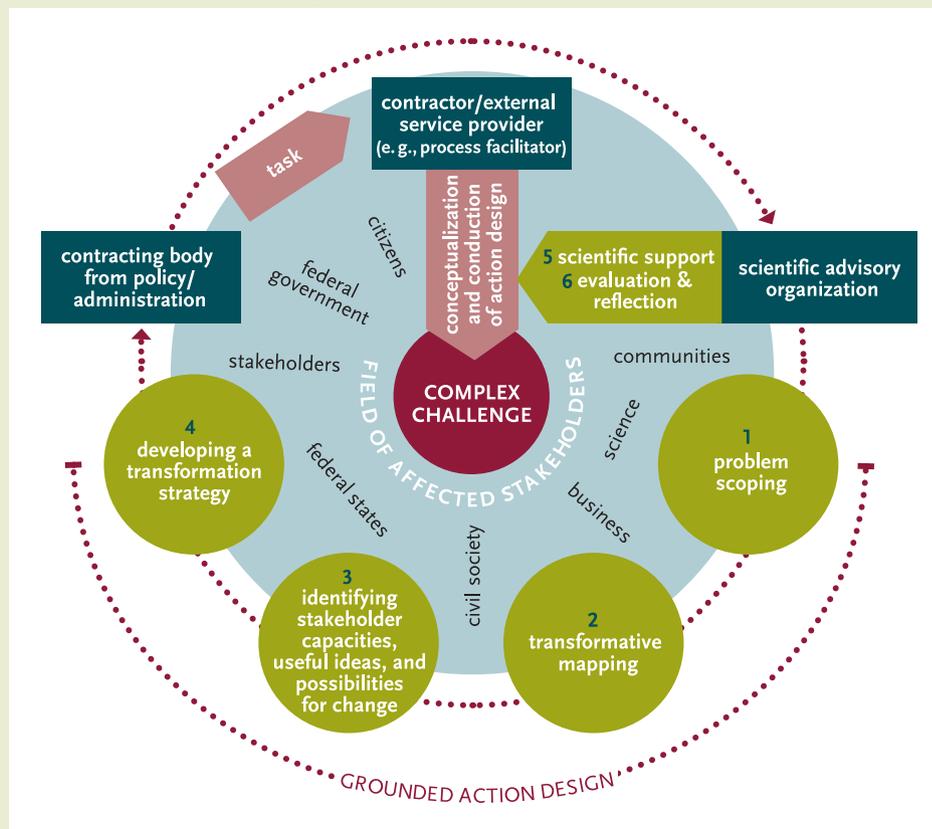
**4. Developing transformation strategy:** Creating a plan to address the complex challenge with relevant stakeholders based on the insights of phases 1 to 3.

#### Reference

Bruhn, T., J. Herberg, G. Molinengo, D. Oppold, D. Stasiak, P. Nanz. 2019. *Grounded action design: A model of scientific support for processes to address complex challenges*. IASS discussion paper. Potsdam: Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS). DOI: 10.2312/iass.2019.054.

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**FIGURE 1:** Grounded action design – a framework for a reflexive and co-creative process.



#### Guiding questions

**1 Problem scoping:** What are each stakeholder’s hopes and expectations? What are their values, normative positions and goals? How do they perceive the problem and relationships among different aspects of the problem? What are the underlying assumptions?

**2 Transformative mapping:** What are the roles of those who are active in the problem space? What skills, competencies and other attributes do the various stakeholders have? What are their interests and positions? How are the stakeholders organized and how are they connected?

**3 Identifying stakeholder capacities, useful ideas, and possibilities for change:** Have unexplored stakeholder capacities become visible through the transformative mapping process? Which synergies among stakeholders and possibilities for future change can be identified?

**4 Developing transformation strategy:** Which measures could foster stakeholder capacities and possibilities for change?

This is the last column in this series which aims to alert GAIA readers to useful frameworks for conducting transdisciplinary research.

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