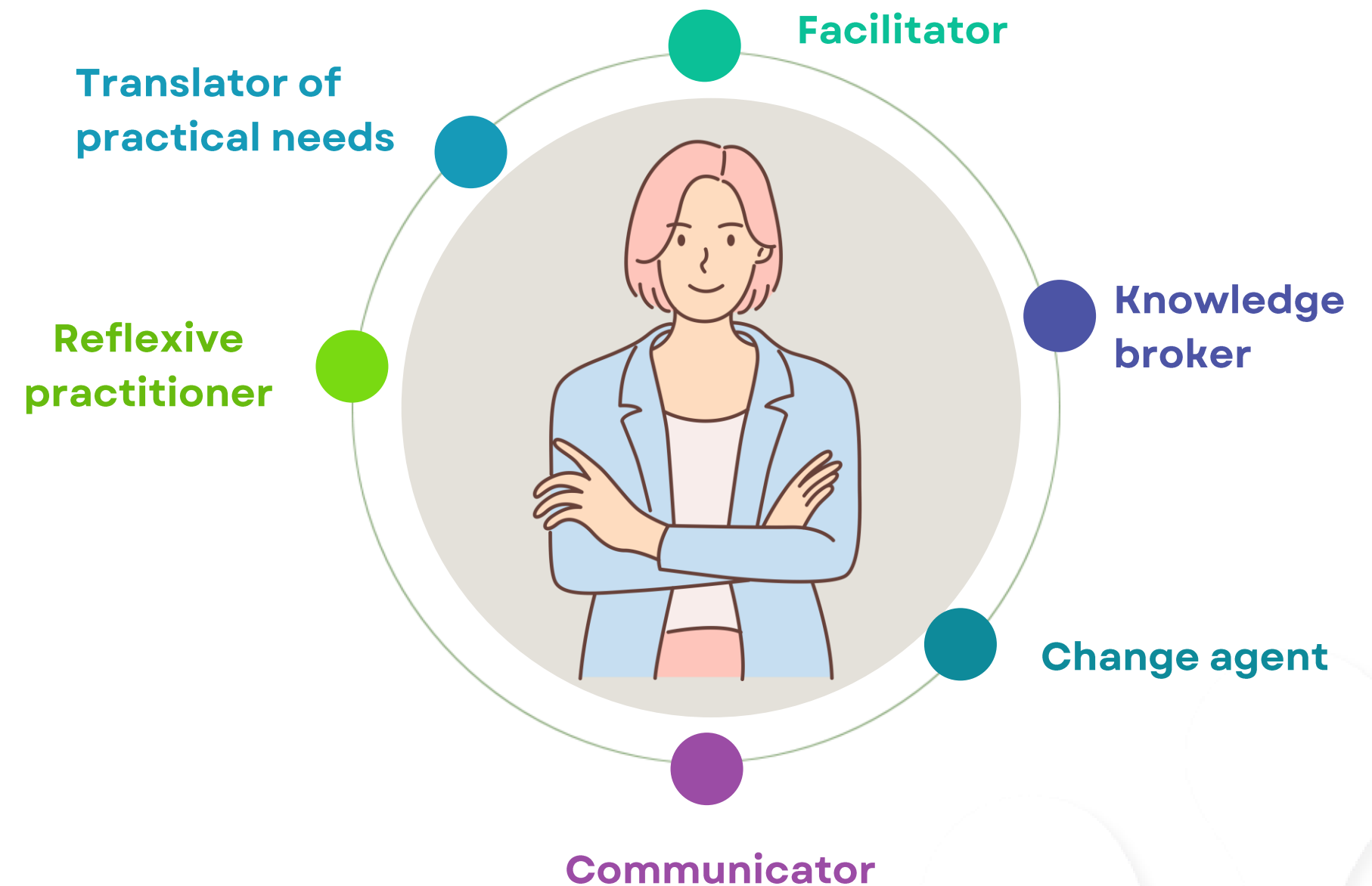# Co-creation or Co-frustration?
Systemic barriers that researchers face in engaging in multi-actor approaches

- Sangeun Bae -

28.05.2025

Background

- Growing popularity of co-creative approaches, as a way to increase the societal impact of agricultural research

- Expanded scope of expectations for researchers who must take on new roles beyond traditional academic functions

- New challenges for researchers who must navigate the complexities associated with co-creative approaches

- Understanding obstacles researchers face in engaging in co-creative approaches, crucial to find intervention pathways


Facilitator

Translator of practical needs

Knowledge broker

Reflexive practitioner

Change agent

Communicator

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Context - Approaches and practical incentives to encourage researchers' engagement in co-creative approaches

1
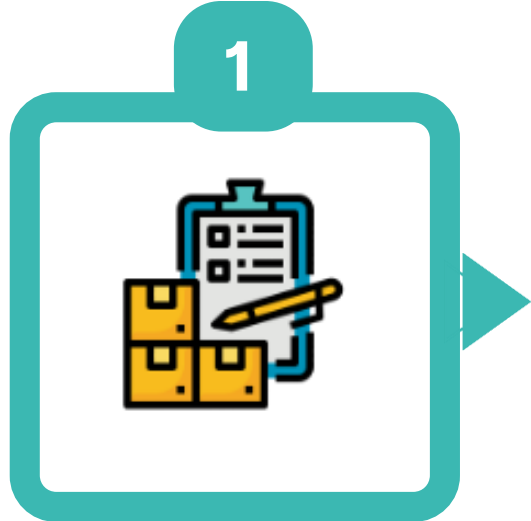
Analyze obstacles and drivers facing the scientific community in engaging in co-creative approaches, along with review of criteria to assess the societal impact of agricultural research

2
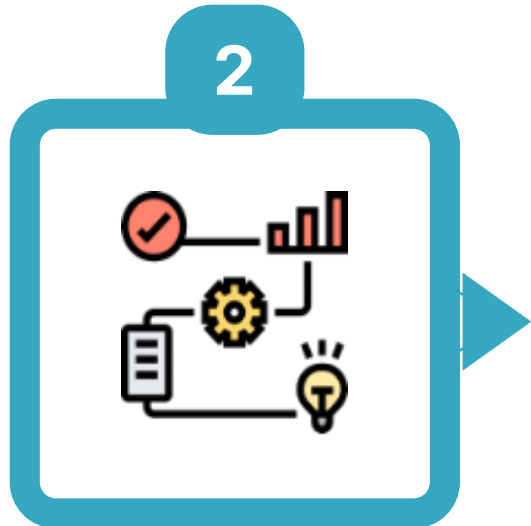
Identify potential pathways to incentivize the engagement of researchers in the implementation of co-creative approaches

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Understanding co-creation

Co-creation involves the **genuine and sufficient involvement of all actors** throughout the whole project: from participation in the development of the project idea, planning and experiments to implementation, communication and dissemination of results and to a possible demonstration phase. In so doing, practitioners and end-users are to be involved, **not as a study object**, but to use their practical and local knowledge and/or entrepreneurial skills to develop solutions and create **co-ownership of results.**

EU Horizon program, 2023-2025

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Methodology for literature review

STEP 1

STEP 2

STEP 3

Shortlisting of core papers:
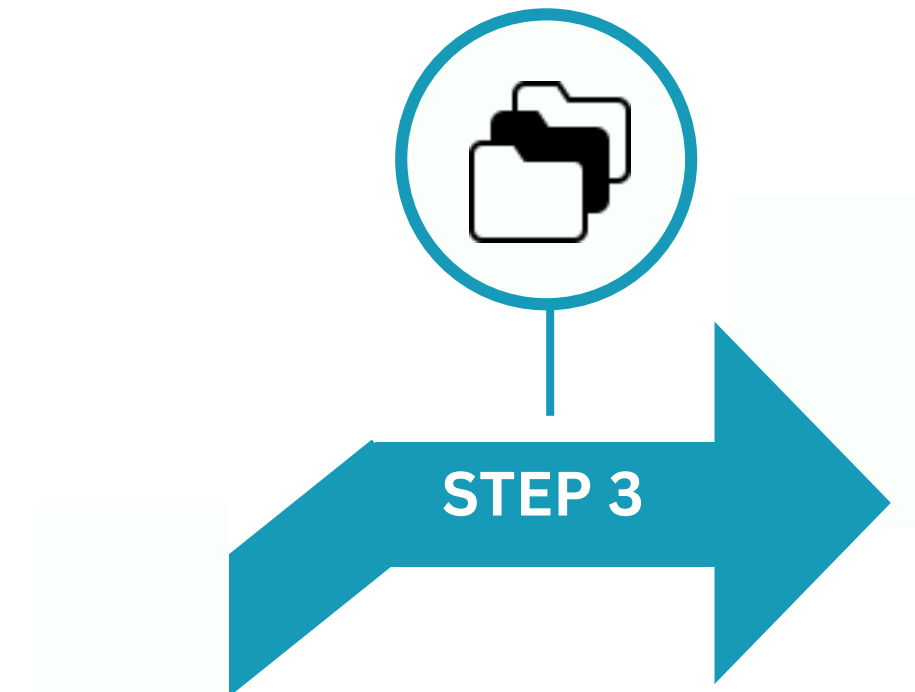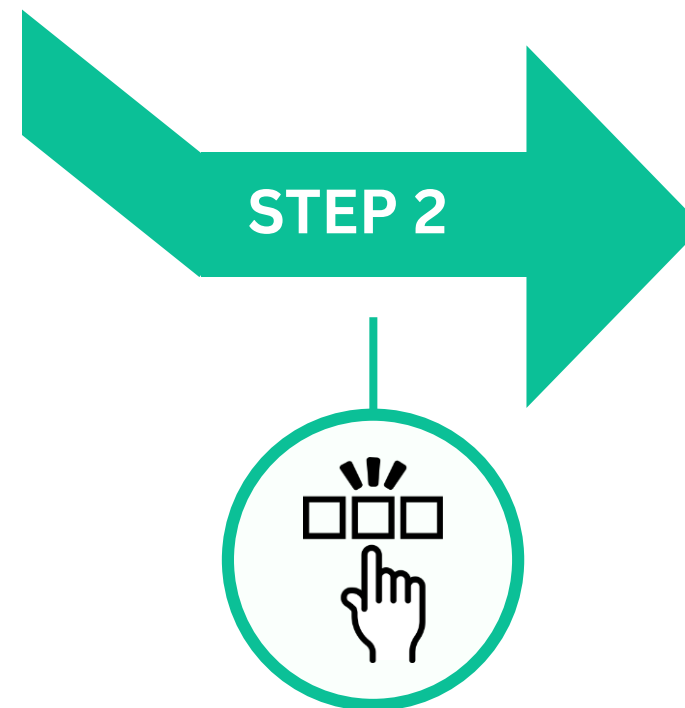Selection of 23 out of 48 key articles and reports

Targeted literature search:
"co-production", "co-creation", "collaborative research", "transdisciplinary research", "participatory action research"

Categorisation of barriers
According to the nested conceptual framework of co-production by Wyborn et al. (2019)

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Overview of obstacles faced by researchers
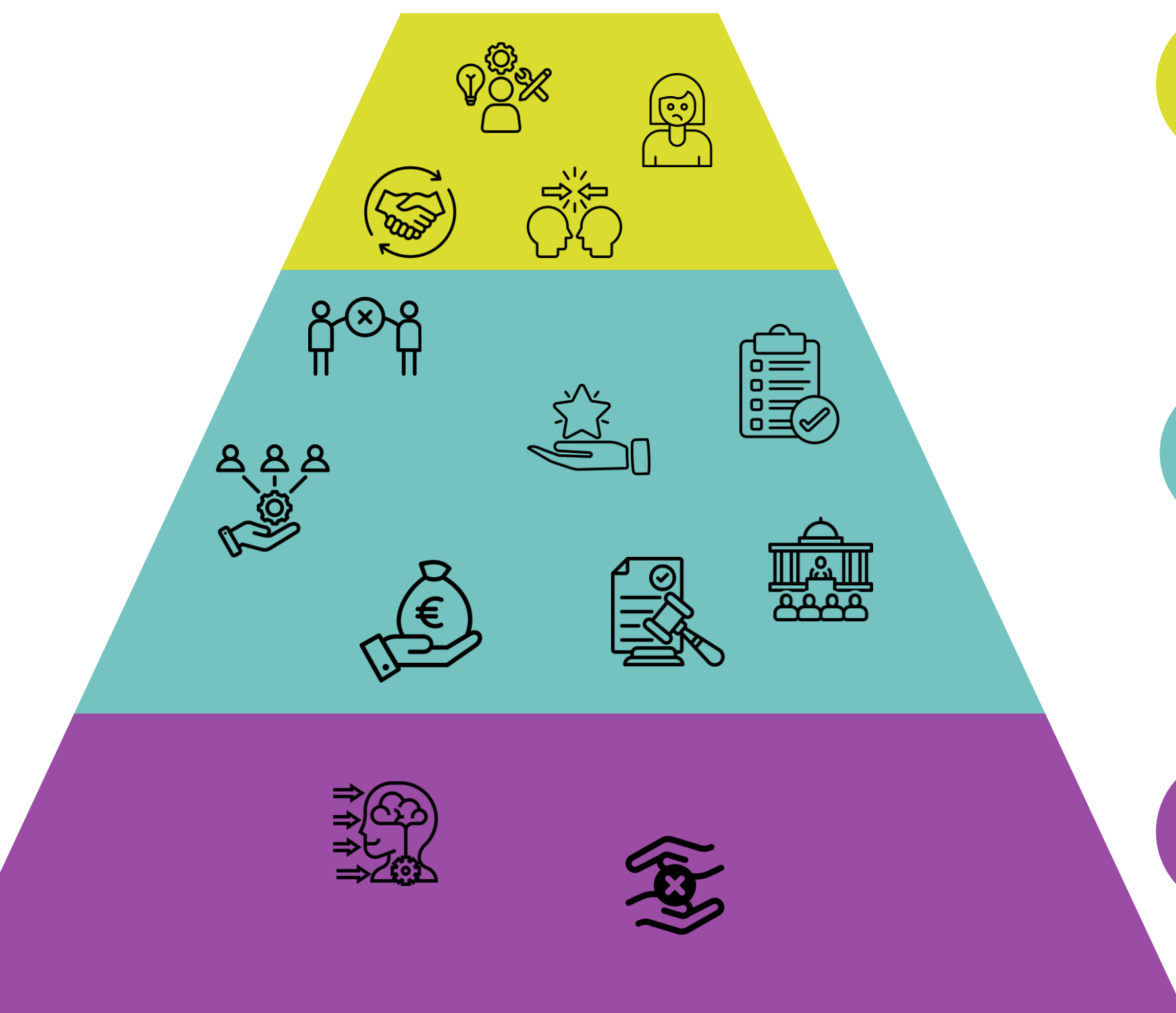
01 **Individuals, actor groups, communities**
Obstacles related to the interactions, relationships, and capacities of those directly involved in co-creation

02 **Institutions, funding, policies**
Obstacles embedded in organisational structures, governance systems, and policy frameworks that shape research and innovation processes
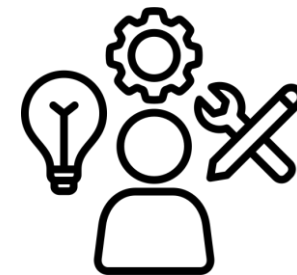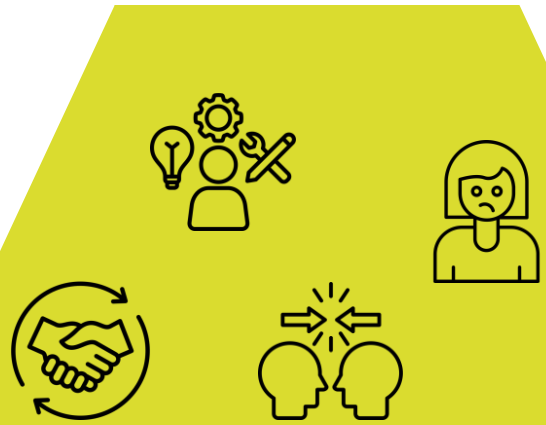
03 **Social and cultural norms**
Obstacles shaped by the broader societal values, beliefs and practices influencing co-creation

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Overview of obstacles faced by researchers

Obstacles at the level of individuals, actor groups, communities (1)

Lack of skills/expertise

- Training needs in knowledge translation and synthesis, communication, workshop facilitation, negotiation
- Lack of training and guidance in practice, especially for young junior researchers

Nyboer et al.(2023);

Establishing and maintaining relationships

- Limited networking and partnership opportunities;
- Challenge of developing long term relationships with non-scientific actors

Oliver et al.(2019); Rölfer et al.(2022); Smith et al. (2022);

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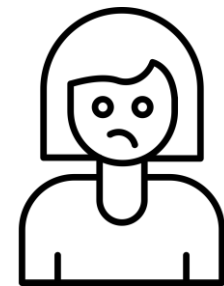
Overview of obstacles faced by researchers

Obstacles at the level of individuals, actor groups, communities (2)
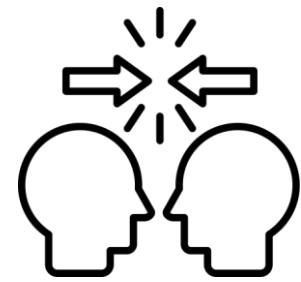
Managing conflicting expectations

- Difficulties in managing different expectations – contrasting research logic and time frames
- Conflicts arising from interpersonal disagreements

McCabe et al. (2023); Sarabi et al. (2021);

Lack of engagement by other actors

- Lack of active engagement and shared responsibility by other stakeholders
- Negative past interactions (?); lack of perceived added value (?); resource constraints (?)

Kozic (2024); Rölfer et al. (2022); Sarabi et al. (2021)

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Overview of obstacles faced by researchers

Obstacles at the level of institutions, funding and policies (1)

Academic incentive system

- Traditional metrics that typically rewards fast scholarship and output quantity over slow scholarship and quality outputs
- Undervaluation of collaborative and impactful research

Staniszewska et al. (2018); Smith et al. (2022); Sarabi et al. (2021);

Lack of quality standards

- Lack of practical, operational criteria for assessing and evaluating the quality of co-creative approaches
- Need for criteria that go beyond mere scientific excellence

Snaapen and Van Drooge (2011); Wolf et al. (2013);

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Overview of obstacles faced by researchers

Obstacles at the level of institutions, funding and policies (2)

Inflexible funding mechanisms
- Funding schemes that do not align with the relational and adaptive nature of co-creative approaches

Boyle et al. (2023); Cronin et al. (2021);

Complicated legal and regulatory framework
- Legal frameworks e.g. intellectual property rights, data sharing, etc. that are sometimes not suited to the collaborative nature of co-creative approaches

Lack of political will and long-term commitment
- Political landscape characterized by short-term agendas and shifting priorities which result in inconsistent support for co-creative approaches

Sarabi et al. (2021); Cronin et al. (2021);

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Overview of obstacles faced by researchers

Obstacles at the level of deeper social and cultural norms
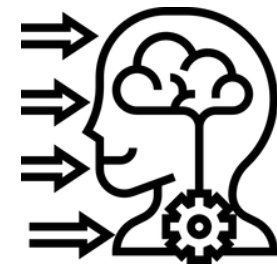
Traditional outlook on knowledge

- Epistemological and methodological norms within academic that devalue experiential knowledge
- Entrenched power hierarchies that lead non-academic actors to undervalue their own knowledge

Beresford (2020); Smith et al. (2022)

Deep-rooted mistrust

Skepticism towards co-creative approaches that are remnants from past historical and social factors.

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Conclusion: Co-creation or Co-frustration?

1

Co-creation is shaped by system conditions, not just intention alone

Co-creation is a complex, situated practice that depend on the enabling factors at interpersonal, institutional and broader social factors.

2

Making co-creation work necessitates coherent support structures

To move from co-frustration to co-creation necessitates coherent support structures across different interventional levels:
- Relational investment
- Institutional change
- Structural reforms

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Thank you