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BRIDGING NARRATIVES ON RESEARCH AND SOIL HEALTH: A TRANSDISCIPLINARY APPROACH CENTERED ON COMMUNICATION AND CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

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This contribution addresses the intricate dimensions of communication and citizens' engagement as exemplified by the BRIDGES project—an initiative aimed at: Building reflexivity and Response-ability Involving Different narratives of knowledGE and Science. The project explored how transdisciplinarity and extended-peer communities of knowledge production represent a groundbreaking effort in communicating soil health as a complex socio-ecological issue. Through the integration of diverse perspectives from various disciplines, and a regular, inclusive and non-formal internal and external communication activity BRIDGES highlighted the interplay among ecological, social, and cultural factors shaping soil representation. BRIDGES designed and facilitated communication activities engaging researchers from different backgrounds, citizens and local stakeholders through artistic workshops, webinars and a citizen science campaign. Communication was the key to the project to make transdisciplinarity alive and inclusive. It was not framed to disseminate activities, but to build relationships, empower younger researchers and engage people, knowledge and epistemic views at every stage of the process.

With a 40-day citizen science experiment to monitor soils in the urban area of Milan, BRIDGES engaged an extended community of peers to co-produce relevant knowledge. Engaged citizens contributed with diverse perspectives to the intricate fabric of soil health thanks to personal immersive monitoring, meetings, local initiatives and online webinars for a mutual understanding of research perspectives and local concerns. To create new narratives on soil-health the project proposed a collaboration between scientists and artists to stimulate collective imagination. Artistic practices served as a conduit, interweaving scientific concepts with experiences capable of transcending rational thought, thus increasing public awareness of the deeper connection between society and soil health. The data collection on peri-urban soils in Milan emphasized the active role of citizens, involved not as mere data collectors but as knowledge producers. Citizen engagement was framed as an empowering force, encouraging individuals to actively contribute valuable insights to soil health research.

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