



A PROactive approach for COmmunities
to enABle Societal Transformation



Gender and intersectionality dimensions in PRO-COAST

Dr. Alexander Yendell

Research Institute Social Cohesion, Section Leipzig, Germany

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PRO-COAST – A PROactive approach for COmmunities to enABle Societal Transformation



EU-Horizon-Call: Understanding the role of behaviour, gender specifics, lifestyle, religious and cultural values, and addressing the role of enabling players (civil society, policy makers, financing and business leaders, retailers) in decision making (Nov 2023 until Oct 2026)

Purpose:

- Address biodiversity loss in European coastal ecosystems

Key Facts:

- 40% of Europeans live within 100km of the coast.
- Coastal ecosystems' services are at risk
- Vulnerable groups are disproportionately affected

Goals of the project:

- Empower local communities for biodiversity restoration and maintenance.
- Integrate local knowledge into practice and policymaking

Scope:

- 20 partners across 14 countries
- 9 unique case studies in various coastal ecosystems
- Testing governance models and social incentives



Relevance of Intersectionality



➤ Why Intersectionality Matters

- Highlights overlapping inequalities (Crenshaw, 1989)
- Essential for tailoring biodiversity strategies to community needs
- Improves stakeholder engagement and inclusivity
- Bridges social and ecological dimensions
- Enables transformative solutions for ecosystems and communities

➤ Positive Experiences in Stakeholder Survey

- Most intersectionality questions successfully included
- Open-minded and supportive project team
 - Natural scientists emphasized the "human side" of biodiversity
- Constructive discussions led to better alignment of perspectives
- Demonstrated the value of integrating social dimensions into biodiversity efforts
- The variety of methods allows for the compensation of weaknesses in individual measurement instruments; for example, difficulties in measuring intersectionality in a survey can be balanced out through additional qualitative interviews.

Question Modifications



➤ Evolution of Survey Questions

- **Original:**

- “Homosexuality is completely acceptable”
- “I think women who decide not to have a family and children are selfish”
- “Discrimination and disadvantage against women must be eliminated”
- “There is a natural hierarchy between black and white people”

- **Modified:**

- “I think it is acceptable if people have a different sexual orientation than mine”
- “I think it is fine if women decide to have a career rather than family and children”
- “Discrimination and disadvantage against women must be eliminated”
- “There is a natural hierarchy between different races”

Question Modifications



- These questions addressing social dominance were excluded
 - “We should do what we can to make conditions more equal for different groups in society”
 - “Equality between different groups in society should be our ideal”
 - “Some groups of people are just more worthy than others”
 - “Inferior groups should stay in their place”
- Even less controversial questions like:
 - "Nowadays, there is much discussion about the different social strata. Which stratum do you consider yourself to belong to?"
- Faced significant resistance in two specific contexts, highlighting cultural sensitivities and stakeholder hesitations.

Challenges Faced



➤ Challenges in Stakeholder Survey Design

- In some cases resistance to politically sensitive questions
- Stakeholder concerns about public image and cultural norms
- Pragmatic constraints: brevity and acceptability of questions
- Emotional discomfort with terms or formulations of variables, even when ethically approved and widely used in research.

Causes of Challenges in Integrating Intersectionality Questions



- **Lack of Mediation and Support**

- Mediators struggled to explain intersectionality questions to stakeholders, especially in culturally sensitive contexts.
- Fear of stakeholders finding questions accusatory led to their reformulation or removal.
- Concerns about negative publicity by one stakeholder limited inclusion of questions on discrimination and inequalities.

- **Cultural and Political Sensitivities**

- Social issues like race, gender, and equality seen as "too political" or irrelevant to biodiversity.
- Fear of community or external criticism discouraged engagement with sensitive topics.

- **Interdisciplinary Blind Spots**

- A minority of natural science team members view social science questions as secondary to ecological goals.
- Social hierarchies and discrimination are seen as peripheral to biodiversity conservation.

- **Emotional Reactions and Ethics Misconceptions**

- Emotional discomfort with direct questions, even if ethically approved and standard in research.
- Questions like “natural hierarchy” faced resistance, despite their purpose to measure explicit bias.

➤ Solutions to Overcome Barriers

- **Awareness-Building:**
 - Early workshops to align understanding of intersectionality
 - Support for mediators to articulate relevance of questions
- **Flexible Methods:**
 - Anonymous online surveys for sensitive topics
 - Qualitative methods for indirect exploration of issues
- **Improved Framing**
 - Link social questions to ecological objectives
 - Communicate practical benefits of addressing intersectionality

➤ Lessons for Future Projects

- **Intersectionality Must Be Integral:**
 - Include as a core component, not an afterthought
 - Calls for proposals should emphasize gender and intersectionality
- **Balance Pragmatism and Integrity:**
 - Weigh stakeholder concerns against research quality
 - Preserve comparability with other studies
- **Create Space for Social Issues:**
 - Encourage open interdisciplinary discussions
 - Recognize social science as essential to project goals

Thank you very much for paying attention!

Pro-Coast: <https://www.pro-coast.eu/>

Dr. Alexander Yendell
Leipzig University
Research Centre Global Dynamics
Nikolaistraße 6-10
D-04109 Leipzig



email: alexander.yendell@uni-leipzig.de

[@alexeyendell.bsky.social](#)

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/alexander-yendell-8aa12010/>