

Challenges and lessons learned in interdisciplinary and participatory ethnobotanical research



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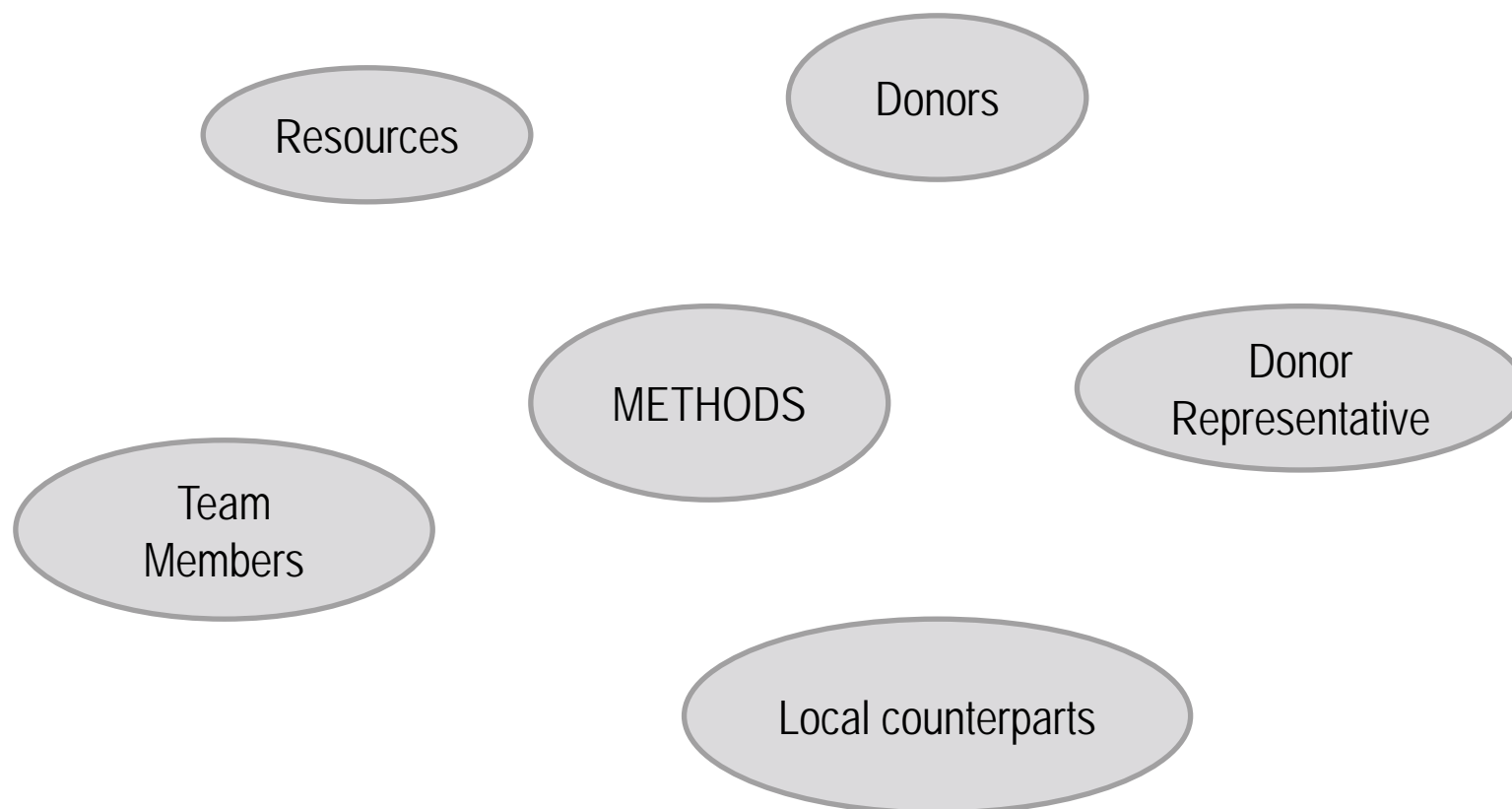
Starting point

- **Ethnobiological and ethnobotanical projects**
 - EC FP7-project: COMBIOSERVE;
 - Provincial, national or international donors;
 - In Europe and Latin America.
- **METHODS are key.**

The best method?

- Ethnobotanical methods are often only seen as
 - recipes;
 - time tested standard procedures.
- It is often neglected that they are
 - culture;
 - embedded in scientists' cosmovision and beliefs;
 - creating culture of interaction between the actors involved.

Embeddedness of methods



Tensions based on resources

- Resources can have a strong impact on:
 - Kind and quality
 - of preparation and social entry;
 - of research questions posed;
 - of data collection and analysis;
 - of dissemination, etc..
 - Degree of participation of local people;
 - Ability for flexibility;
 - Mutual trust, understanding, ability and will for learning.
- Short or long is not a question of good or bad;
- A key problem is writing over-ambitious proposals;
- But besides these technical considerations: Understanding the use resources as culture.

Stepping in & Phasing out

- Often the planning of methods includes just the data collection and analysis and misses
 - Making contact
 - Stepping in
 - Spreading information
 - Getting familiar
 - Adapting
 - Phasing out
 - Leaving behind
 - Giving back
 - Following up

Tensions based on institutional donor characteristics



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- Donors are a diverse landscape and have an explicit impact on
 - Duration of exploratory phase;
 - Degree of participation;
 - Complexity of methods;
 - Degree of dissemination;
 - Freedom for change and adaptation.
- But besides these technical considerations: Donors characteristics implicitly influence the methods chosen.

Tensions based on personality of donor representative



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- Donor representatives might be even more diverse;
- In planning and implementing methods it is wise being aware of
 - Criteria of evaluation;
 - Communication expected;
 - Representatives' personal ambitions
- But besides these technical considerations: Are we aware on the human being representing the donor with his/her implicit and explicit expectations?

Tensions based on characteristics of team members

- Team characteristics have strong impact on the methods used and their implementation
 - Personalities;
 - Disciplinary diversity;
 - Cultural Diversity, incl. language diversity;
 - Colonial history;
 - Degrees of familiarity with the fieldsides and local counterparts.
- Professional team building for a proper implementation of methods.
- But besides these technical considerations: we are not trained as psychologists but have to deal with different, unexpected behavior.

Tensions based on characteristics of local counterparts

- Expectations of local counterparts' are always different from those of academic scientists and depend on:
 - Previous experiences with scientists;
 - Exposure to media, formal education;
 - Link of the research topic to local needs;
 - Resources involved and provided by scientists;
 - Roles expected by scientists;
 - Changing political and socio-economic conditions.
- These factors become active when approaching communities ethnobotanical research.

Summary

- Planning and using methods is a social and cultural act;
- Selecting and applying methods in ethnobotanical projects creates a diversity of interfaces → *Negotiation*;
- Methods include tools, terms and procedures loaded with culture specific meanings → *Decoding*;
- Use of methods is an act of social interaction with *the other* → *Consciousness*.