



The Transformation Gap

**What 344 EU-funded projects
reveal about biodiversity,
equity and transformative change**



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LET'S TURN ON TRANSFORMATION



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Background

DAISY analysed **344 Horizon Europe, LIFE and Biodiversa+ projects** that explicitly referred to societal transformation in order to understand how the concept is currently applied in European research and innovation. Using **59 indicators across 11 dimensions**, the review examined projects' approaches to transformation, biodiversity, equity, intersectionality, innovation, policy and behavioural interventions, underlying causes of human–nature disconnection and risks.

Dimension	What we found	Share of projects	
Incremental transformations	Project mainly focus on adapting existing systems, not changing them	54.4%	High focus
Capabilities equity	Building skills, knowledge and resources	41.9%	Moderate focus
Biodiversity mentioned	Biodiversity is included, but often not central	36.6%	Moderate focus
Political transformation	Changes to policies, governance and institutions	43.6%	Moderate focus
Practical transformation	Solutions and actions in practice	34.9%	Moderate focus
Personal transformation	Shifts in values, mindsets and lifestyle	5.1%	Low focus
Procedural equity	Inclusion in decision-making processes	10%	Low focus
Fundamental transformation	Questioning core systems, power and structures	12.5%	Low focus
Recognition equity	Valuing different identities, cultures and knowledge	5%	Very low focus
Integrated all 3 spheres	Personal + Practical + Political transformation together	12%	Very low focus
Distributive equity	Fair distribution of resources, power and benefits	0.3%	Critical gap

Distributive equity is almost absent. Only 1 project out of 344 addressed it explicitly.

Key messages



1. Transformation is widely discussed but rarely systemic

More than half of the projects (54.4%) framed transformation as incremental change, such as improving existing systems through capacity building or optimisation, while **only 10.2% described transformation as fundamental system change.**

This suggests that the language of transformation is frequently used without addressing deeper structural change.

2. Political and practical change dominate over personal transformation

Projects primarily focused on political transformation (43.6%), including governance and policy reforms, and practical transformation (34.9%), such as technologies and behavioural change. By contrast, personal transformation, including values, worldviews and cultural change, appeared in only 15.1% of projects.

Only 11 projects (3.2%) integrated all three transformation spheres.





3. Equity remains unevenly addressed

The dominant justice perspective was capabilities equity (41.9%), emphasising empowerment, skills and capacity building. Procedural equity appeared in 11% of projects and recognition equity in 5.5%. Most strikingly, **distributive equity** – the fair distribution of costs, benefits and resources – was identified in **only one project (0.3%)**, highlighting a major blind spot in current transformation efforts.

4. Biodiversity is present but seldom central

Only **36.6%** of projects explicitly addressed biodiversity, and just **one project** included measurable biodiversity indicators or outcomes. Biodiversity was therefore often treated as a general aspiration rather than an operational objective.

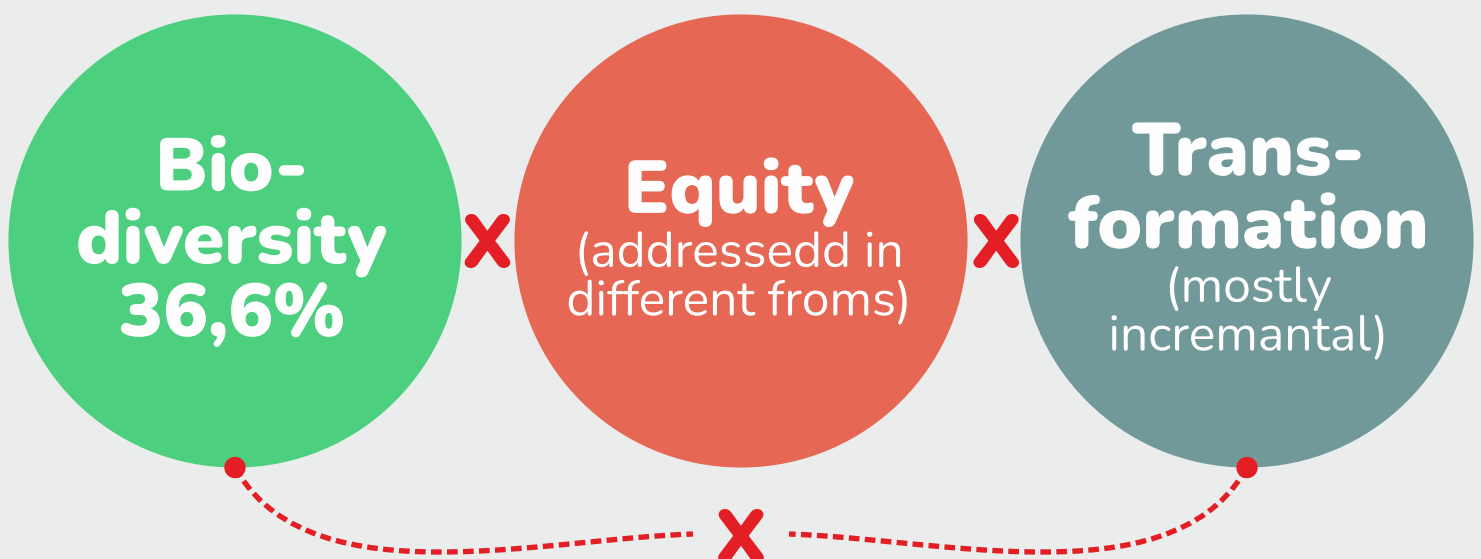


5. Biodiversity, equity and transformation remain poorly integrated and connected

The analysis revealed relatively weak connections between biodiversity, transformation and justice dimensions. Projects tended to address these themes separately rather than as mutually reinforcing components of systemic change, indicating a fragmented understanding of transformative biodiversity governance.

6. Interventions favour information over structural change

Across the reviewed projects, **informational measures ("sermons") were the most common interventions**, followed by regulatory measures ("sticks"), while economic incentives ("carrots") and interventions targeting social norms or behavioural architecture were much less frequent. The strongest projects combined multiple intervention types with enabling governance conditions, suggesting that transformative change requires integrated intervention mixes.



Overall conclusions



Although the discourse of transformation is now widespread across EU-funded research, current projects still predominantly emphasise **incremental change, governance and capacity building**, while giving limited attention to **deep systemic transformation, distributive justice and integrated biodiversity – equity approaches**. These gaps provided the empirical foundation for the **Transformative Diagnostic Tool (TRD2)*** to assess innovations against a more comprehensive understanding of transformative change.

Read more about the research **here**** and **contact us** if you have further queries. 



* <https://mydaisy.eu/trd2/>

** <https://mydaisy.eu/trd2-manual/>

