

Stage Two Ethics Amendment: Working Group Detail

Amendment to ETH20-5061 – further detail for working groups, data collection and a business experiment

This paper details an amendment to ETH20-5061 as per the agreed phased ethics approach. Specifically, this paper provides the next phase of detail for data collection, working groups and a business experiment.

Designing Transition to Regenerative Agriculture | PhD Research

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This amendment contains:

- Quick overview of the research
- Working group detail
- Additional information for data collection
- Information about a business experiment

Quick overview of the research

This research centres around a Regenerative Agriculture transition project that is taking a participatory action research approach augmented by design approaches. With informed consent, participants may be engaged in a range of activities - for instance working groups, semi-structured interviews, and group workshops. All participant input and activity will be focused on understanding what supports transition to Regenerative Agriculture and how that support might be developed and put in place.

I will develop a case study to tell the story of this project, the working groups and the business experiment; and I will form my thesis by reflecting on this case study.

The role of working groups in facilitating transition

Any change agent (in this case, the researcher) has available to them a number of ways of working to promote change. They may invent solutions, influence opinion, facilitate collaboration, procure investment, etc. In surveying the many ways to promote change available to the researcher for this transition project, considerations were made for ways of working most relevant to the project (e.g. the transition need), most feasible for the researcher and most likely to promote change.

Facilitating collaboration through working groups dedicated to a key topic was chosen as a key form of intervention for this project because it fit the named criteria AND this way of working is known for its potential to harness collective action to achieve change. This is evidenced by the bodies of literature for Participatory Action Research and Collective Impact (bibliography available on request). Working groups tend to come together around a cause and create change through a series of actions, which might include initiatives, projects, events, campaigns, a movement etc.

Selecting working groups

Taking a working group approach is an important choice in this research, but the topic area of the working group is also critical to the ability to effect change.

The scoping research for this project identified a number of systems barriers to transition:

- Social pressure against regenerative methods; social pressure driving conformity to the status quo of conventional agriculture
- Difficulties individual farmers face in transitioning a property:
 - Assembling a (new) farming management practice from the cacophony of info out there
 - Identifying appropriate and affordable support
 - Creating their own manageable transition plan
 - Affording the transition process

- Correctly implementing practices
- Gaps in supply chain to farmers, e.g. for biological inputs rather than chemical inputs, suitable fencing and watering, etc.
- Lack of processing and distribution options that reflect the quality of regen products beyond either mainstream abattoirs and retail (e.g. Woolies and Coles) or DIY direct-to-market (including CSA schemes and farmers markets)
- Farmers transitioning one at a time, rather than harnessing the collective power of region- or sector-wide transitions
- Lack of research and science in the mainstream that is appropriate to agroecology and regenerative agriculture
- The need for critical industries like banking and insurance to work with the investment resilience and potential that is created by regenerative approaches
- Agricultural policy, incentive schemes and grant programs that could re-designed and/or aligned to better realise agricultural resilience through regenerative methods
- Political behavior that protects the status quo rather than ecological function as the bedrock of an economy, food security and a functioning nation
- A shared vision of the future of regenerative agriculture.

To make an impact on the ability of farmers to take up Regenerative Agriculture, the researcher's hypothesis is that any working group should focus on at least one if not more of these systemic barriers to transition.

During the course of the scoping research, the following working groups emerged with the potential to impact one or more of these barriers: (NOTE: details omitted for confidentiality in publication)

1. **Developing a Research Network** – creating academic, scientific and farmer collaboration to progress a field of research around a shared body of knowledge
2. **Working for a leading farmer** - supporting an innovator & change agent's projects
3. **Partnering with an organisation** to support the work of articulating the work of an innovator, and to promote the uptake of their approaches not just among farmers but in landscape decision-making and policy
4. **Financial Transition working group** – in development – to convene a conversation around the financial planning and options to support transition.

Working group details

This section provides a definition of each working group and the ethics considerations specific to that group. For each working group, the following questions are answered:

- What is this group focused on? (brief description)
- How will it contribute to greater uptake of regen ag?
- How will it contribute to understanding Transition Design practice?
- Specific ethics considerations

- Each working group has a dedicated information sheet (except the business experiment). These information sheets are provided further below in the attachment.

(NOTE: details omitted for confidentiality in publication)

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x

x

x

x

Overview of an ethics approach for working groups

Following on from the detailed description of each working group and specific ethics considerations for that group, Table 1 outlines an overall ethics approach that I will follow across all working groups.

Table 1. Ethics approach specific for working groups

<i>Research activities</i>	
Overview of the research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The purpose of this research is to progress Transition Design practice through a Transition Design project • The project that has been selected is a project to ‘increase transition to Regenerative Agriculture, by design’ • The project is being undertaken through an emergent series of working groups, workshops and semi-structured interviews, within the framework of participatory action research methodology • A case study approach will be applied to the project in order to research the practice of Transition Design. Case study analysis will be supported by three layers of documentation and reflection: 1) project description 2) explanation of practice supported by analysis of qualitative data 3) exploration of themes and final case assertions • Data gathered during the course of working groups, workshops and semi-structured interviews will be used to inform the case study
Project activity: Working groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Methodology: based on participatory action research and design research approaches • Methodology detail: discussed in the researcher’s ethics positioning paper (submitted for preliminary ‘in principle’ ethics approval)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A working group is a group that comes together to work on a specific topic. The activities of a working group will be determined by the working group and may be diverse and varied, including research, influencing stakeholders, holding events, running learning or training sessions, executing projects, media, publications, etc. • The researcher will request to document the working group's process and activities, e.g. via photos of activities, tracking of project materials, and reflection on process (group and researcher). This documentation will inform the project case study.
<p>Working group reflection activity: Semi-structured interviews</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Methodology: The semi-structured interview approach is based on sociological traditions of qualitative research • In this research, semi-structured interviews are a means for participants to reflect on the research and the working group. This reflection will inform the project case study. • After working groups reach a major milestone, semi-structured interviews may be conducted by the researcher with group members and potentially participants to reflect on the work of the group and the process • A 'major milestone' is a turning point in the group's work or the end of a phase of work that contributes to the change the working group seeks to make. Major milestones will differ by working group. They may occur after many months or a year or so of work. • Key interview topics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Theory of Change, strategy and key actions for the working group – what works well, even better if, questions that remain ○ Reflection on the context and journey of the working group ○ Contribution of the working group to transition to regenerative agriculture ○ Reflection on key conditions, capabilities and activities required to enable the Theory of Change (including any relevant skills the researcher offered) ○ Discussion of the 'Most Significant Change' (MSC) – based on MSC methodology ○ Reflection on the Transition Design Framework and its relevance to the working group ○ Reflecting on what (else) might be needed to support Transition Design practice
<p>Working group reflection activity: Group workshops</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For some working groups, the researcher may elect to facilitate group workshops instead of or in addition to semi-structured interviews as part of the reflection process. This reflection will inform the project case study. • The researcher may conduct up to two x 1.5-hour workshops, e.g. one session in the early stages of my involvement with the working group and one session toward the end of my research

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops to be designed and facilitated based on participatory traditions and design research methods for facilitating group work • Discussion topics will be similar to those of the semi-structured interviews
Data collection during working group events	<p>Working groups will hold different events based on their own plans that are separate to this research, e.g. field days, online learning sessions, team workshops, etc. The researcher may wish to conduct data gathering as part of these events, and will request consent of both the working group as well as the event participants to do so.</p> <p>This process is described in detail below in the rows for ‘Consent to conduct data gathering during working group events’</p>
COVID Safety	At all times current government COVID safety protocols in place and UTS ethics requirements RE: COVID safety will be followed.
<i>Fair participant selection</i>	
Participant recruitment	<p>Recruitment methods:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working groups are formed in a few different ways: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Researcher joins an existing working group, e.g. the researcher is recruited ○ Researcher forms a new working group among people who are interested in collaborating • Participants for new working groups will be recruited via the following methods: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Researcher shares the opportunity with existing participants, e.g via email or phone call ○ Referral – existing participants suggest a specific participant to the researcher and provides contact info ○ Social media, including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Outreach via Instagram and Facebook, under the researcher’s personal accounts and TransitionAg business accounts ▪ Outreach to Facebook groups that the researcher belongs to ▪ Other media as necessary, e.g. via LinkedIn, Eventbrite, Twitter, etc ○ Cold calling, e.g. through info online ○ Snowball sampling – Existing participants, groups and organisations reach out through their contacts and marketing databases (e.g. to invite people to working groups, which may include workshops or events)
Sufficiency of sample size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guided by sociological traditions of qualitative research as well as participant perspectives • By nature, working groups tend to be small – 2 to 12 people

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Per working group, the researcher will be looking for a quorum for workshops, e.g. enough participation to represent the diverse perspectives within the working group
<i>Informed consent</i>	
<p>Providing information up-front for ‘informed consent’</p>	<p>Information / invitation letters describing the research will be provided in writing at the initial point of contact or engagement with a group – e.g. when the researcher joins or forms a working group. In this information, the researcher will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information about the research. • Identify the activities the researcher may take part in as a group participant. • Identify the research activities that the researcher may request consent for • Confirm that research activities will not proceed without discussion and acknowledgement of consent. • For working groups, written consent is preferred but consent is considered tacit/implicit if information about the research has been provided, consent has been discussed and participation continues. <p>When the researcher wishes to conduct research activities, such as interviews, workshops and collecting data, consent will be requested. An information sheet and consent form will be provided.</p>
<p>Consent for working group interviews and/or workshops</p>	<p>For interviews and workshops that the researcher wishes to conduct, participants will be invited, provided information and asked to provide their consent either verbally or in writing. The information and consent request will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information about the interview or workshop, including format, duration, location, key topics, other attendees as relevant • Stress that participation is opt-in, voluntary and that individuals can freely opt-out at any time. They can also request the withdrawal of their contributions at any time. • Acknowledge the objective of working as collaborator and change agent • Provide an overview of the research methods and process • Explain positive aspects and benefits of the research as well as risks • Identify the points in the process where consent will be requested: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ For gathering data and documentation ○ Prior to interviews and/or workshops ○ Prior to publication of any data that cites the participant (in a de-identified way) • Identify the types of data that will be collected for the working group, e.g. photos of activities, tracking of project materials, and reflections on process (group and researcher)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge potential future dissemination of information • Invite individuals to participate in specified ways <p>Written consent is preferred but consent is considered tacit/implied if information about the research has been provided, consent has been discussed and participation continues.</p>
Consent to conduct data gathering during working group events	Working groups will hold different events based on their own plans that are separate to this research, e.g. field days, online learning sessions, team workshops, etc. The researcher may wish to conduct data gathering as part of these events, and will request consent of both the working group as well as the event participants to do so.
	At the start of events, the researcher will give a verbal description of the research and then will provide written information and a consent form for the participants to review and complete.
	As part of requesting consent, I will ask permission to take photos, video and audio recording, as well as record answers to group discussion questions, which may end up in being published in a de-identified manner in my thesis, on my TransitionAg blog and social media, or in a published article or conference presentation.
Consent of ‘late joiners’	This information and consent process will be conducted with each individual no matter what stage they join (e.g. from the beginning or midway, etc.)
When UTS ethics consent is NOT required	<p>The day-to-day activity of working groups does not require consent. Working group activities will be determined by each group as needed.</p> <p>Only the activities being conducted for the purpose of research, gathering of data for the case study, or sharing information about the research project requires consent from the working group members and/or participants.</p>
<i>Protection of identity, data and dissemination</i>	
Handling of data	Data will be stored on UTS provided platforms, eg OneDrive for most purposes and IF a survey is conducted, Qualtrics will be used
	Handwritten notes will be stored in a secure location
	The list of original contacts and the code or pseudonym associated with participant details will be retained in a separate file
	In shared or published data, unless agreed explicitly in writing, data will be de-identified and participant contributions (e.g. quotes) will be identified by a pseudonym and/or type of group that they belong to. Effort will be taken to eliminate information that could be linked back to individuals.
Privacy and confidentiality	<p>By activity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews are treated as confidential and information will only be shared in de-identified ways unless otherwise agreed in writing.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group workshops will be treated as confidential amongst enrolled participants and information will only be shared in de-identified ways unless otherwise agreed in writing. <p>How data from easily identifiable individuals is handled will be agreed with that individual</p> <p>Participants will be invited to review and provide feedback on findings once the information is de-identified and summarised for the research</p> <p>Participants are asked for their input and comments on the findings confidentially, individually or in a group setting - as appropriate</p>
Data analysis	<p>Thesis documentation will be comprised of: 1) Project documentation - outputs and materials in service of the Regenerative Agriculture Transition Design project, and 2) case study documentation of the PhD research into Transition Design practice. Tentatively there may be an exhibition as well.</p> <p>A case study approach will be applied to the project in order to research the practice of Transition Design. Case study analysis will be supported by three layers of documentation and reflection: 1) project description 2) explanation of practice supported by analysis of qualitative data 3) exploration of themes and final case assertions.</p> <p>In support of developing the case study, each working group will be asked for consent for the researcher to document the working group's process and activities. Project documentation will be developed based on relevant practice traditions, e.g. participatory action research and design research, which are inclusive of the agreed ethics approach.</p> <p>Qualitative data from interviews and workshops will be analysed thematically based on sociological traditions. This will be used to inform the case study analysis.</p>
Dissemination of data	<p>When preparing to disseminate research, consent to share participant contributions will be requested in writing. Written consent is preferred, e.g. via the consent form or in an email. Verbal consent is ok.</p> <p>The plan for data dissemination will be informed by and, as appropriate, validated by participants. In some cases, data dissemination may be accomplished together with participants. Data to be disseminated could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documentation, e.g. Scoping Phase report, etc. Public reports Blogs, social media posts and news, including the researcher's TransitionAg business accounts providing a reference to the PhD research and UTS HREC number Journal articles, conference presentations, and other peer-reviewed destinations

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• PhD thesis• Book• Others to be determined
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Running a business experiment: [TransitionAg](#)

As mentioned, working groups are not the only way to create change. During the course of the research, the idea emerged that a business focused on supporting farmer transition might also be needed. There are many consultants, trainers and educators dedicated to teaching farmers new techniques. These are typically focused on teaching farmers to use a single technique. Some teach how to manage holistically. And the market of support for the regenerative agriculture sector is growing in leaps and bounds. In the past couple years, there have emerged a number of new types of coaching offers, a new regen ag degree, a wave of fresh investment and financing models, etc. In the blink of an eye, it has become an exciting and tumultuous time to be a part of the movement in favour of regenerative, agroecological forms of agriculture.

All of this activity shows promise for growth in the regenerative agriculture sector, but it seems that farmers are still left to their own devices to assemble an end-to-end regenerative management approach, with all the layers of financials, planning, on-farm transition, supply chain, marketing and distribution to work through themselves. It also seems as though there is more demand for training than supply, or that the supply is out of reach financially for a section of the market. It is these gaps that the business idea seeks to address. The current assumption is that the business will offer online learning, coaching, peer support, resources and referrals focused on transition, where I will “hold the network” and bring together various experts to support the offering.

From a methodological perspective, I am treating the business idea as an experiment for the purposes of the research, influenced heavily by Lean Startup and design research approaches. I am participating in a business incubator, and so far have taken the business idea through concept validation. I am now moving into product testing, working to develop an offering that I can pull together that the market needs. Similar offerings are appearing in the market, and it will be informative to see where the value proposition lands.

I believe it is worth reflecting on this business experiment in the project case study as it forms part of a Transition Design practice.

How will it contribute to greater uptake of regen ag?

This business is dedicated to looking for commercial service and support opportunities that can directly enable farmers and the broader agricultural sector in the journey to transition to regenerative, agroecological approaches.

How will it contribute to understanding Transition Design practice?

The business is a vehicle to test and prove out commercial offerings in support of transition. Taking a deliberate experimental approach and reflecting on the journey of establishing this business and developing products (eg resources, support, services etc) may inform future commercial opportunities for other Transition Designers.

Specific ethics considerations

- I will provide an update to existing participants to let them know about my progress, each of the working groups, the business experiment and this stage of work.
- I will tell the story of how the TransitionAg business has emerged as an opportunity from the PhD research, and that I am treating the business as an experiment in and of itself. I will invite their feedback, participation or request to stay informed in any of the working groups and in the business.
- I will let participants know that I intend to share research materials and findings (e.g. the Stage One Scoping Report, Summary Presentation and other materials with consent) via the TransitionAg website and social media.
- My participation in working groups is a firstly a research activity, in the traditions of participatory action research and deep ethnography. The data to be gathered is limited to interviews, workshop discussion and project outputs that the working group consent to. The purpose of gathering these data and the reflections on the data is to construct a case study on transition design, which will form the basis of the thesis.
- What is learned about the nature of transition through the course of these reflections will inform the business, but the insights from these reflections are not the only learning that will inform the business.
- I will also conduct market testing specific to the business and separate from the research.
- If working group activity becomes commercial, I will develop a commercial arrangement together with relevant working group members.
- I will address how working group activity may inform the business idea in the information sheets. I will emphasise that consent is up to the participants and that they can opt out at any time.