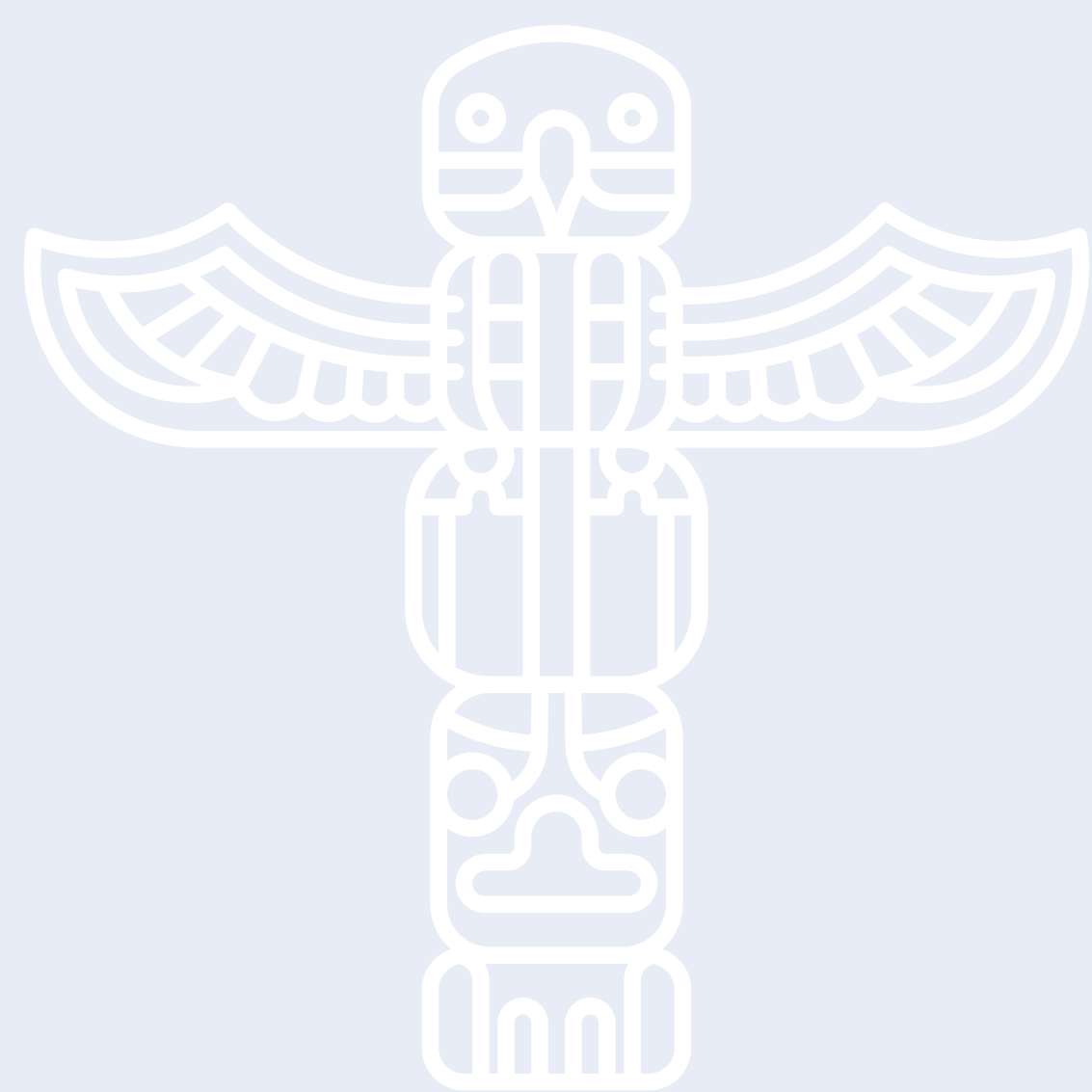




# Identifying and Overcoming Hierarchies That Hinder Interdisciplinary Research

Prof. Florence Degavre<sup>a</sup> & Prof. Luca Tateo<sup>b</sup> – Co-Principal Investigators  
Dr. Zahra Abbasi<sup>b</sup>, Dr. Maísa Edwards<sup>c</sup>, Dr. Amaury Peeters<sup>a,d</sup>, Dr. Ingrid Schlindwein<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>UCLouvain  
<sup>b</sup>University of Oslo  
<sup>c</sup>King's College London  
<sup>d</sup>Louvain Cooperation

## Summary of Impacts

The initiative led to:

- A collaborative research project with multidisciplinary team exploring hierarchies in academia.
- Workshops (Louvain-la-Neuve, London, Oslo) funded by Circle U.
- Three articles in progress - one to be submitted in October 2025.

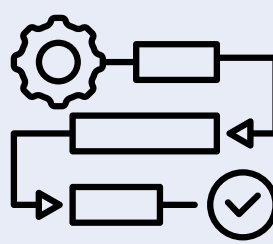
Key messages:

- Emphasis on the need for supportive environments for interdisciplinary research.
- Institutional hierarchies and disciplinary silos are major obstacles to scientific collaboration.
- Political and structural barriers undermine inclusive and democratic knowledge production.
- Sustaining critical and interdisciplinary practices is essential to effectively respond to global issues.

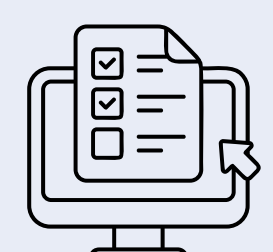
## Activity Type



- **Seed-Funded Proposal Writing** to initiate collaborative research



- **Research Methodology Development** to instil a interdisciplinary & collaborative approach



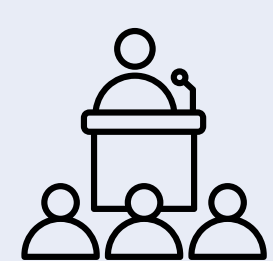
- **Online Survey:** Capturing diverse perspectives on interdisciplinary collaboration



- **Workshops:** Organized in Louvain-la-Neuve, London, and Oslo to foster dialogue and co-creation



- **Article Writing:** Three academic papers in progress to disseminate findings



- **Dissemination & Conference Participation** to share insights and engage with broader academic communities

## Context

Interdisciplinary work is becoming more and more important in academia and freedom of research is an important topic.

CircleU fosters interdisciplinary collaboration by connecting universities and academics to address global challenges.

## Objectives

- Exploring how hierarchies shape interdisciplinary research and collaboration in academia.
- Investigating how institutional structures, disciplinary prestige, and interpersonal dynamics influence researchers' experiences and the sustainability of interdisciplinary work.
- Understanding why interdisciplinarity is often associated with resistance and the pursuit of academic freedom.
- Analyzing the reproduction of hierarchies across roles, disciplines, and contexts helps identify barriers to collaboration.
- Promoting the democratization of science and foster more inclusive research environments.

## Key Findings

Hierarchies in academia manifest across roles, disciplines, and geographical contexts, reinforcing inequalities in knowledge production, recognition, and career progression.

While hierarchies are common in organizations, they can negatively affect scholars' well-being and professional development.

Disciplinary hierarchies often privilege hard sciences over social sciences and humanities, and intersect with age and gender inequalities.

## Methodology

The methodology followed 6 steps, starting with the authors' own experiences analysis (with the help of auto-ethnography).

1- Joint exploration of experienced hierarchies in interdisciplinary initiatives [Auto-ethnography]

2- Problem Statement and Research Question Definition

3- Literature review, theories, own experiences related to hierarchies

4- Questionnaire development and dissemination

5- Iterative Code Development [deductive & inductive approaches]

6- Interpretation & Qualitative elements excerpts & Writing

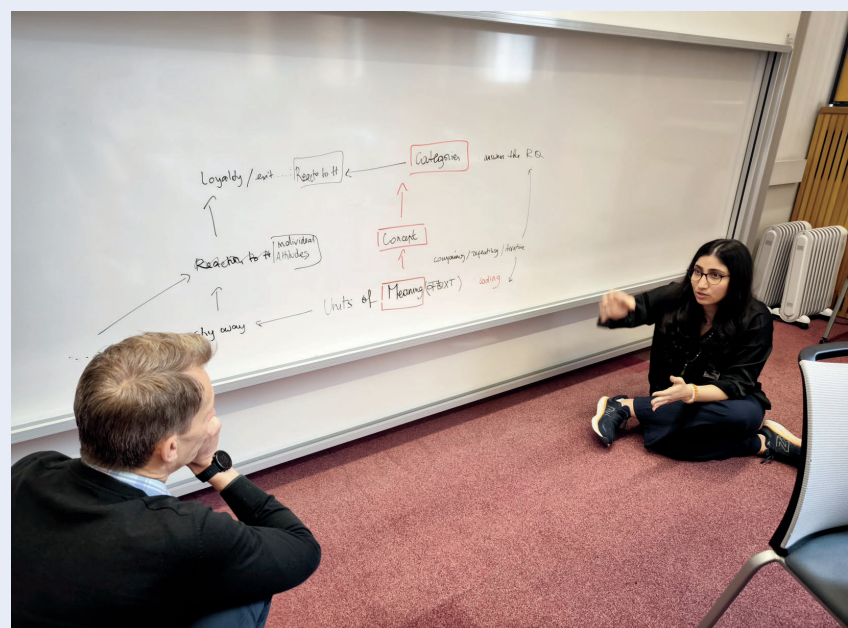
A qualitative survey with scholars involved in interdisciplinary work was conducted. This allowed reflection on the various types of hierarchies present in academia and how they can represent obstacles to fostering collaboration among people with different disciplinary backgrounds.



CircleU Sandpit at UCLouvain (Sep/Nov'22) - First discussion & emerging ideas



1st Workshop at King's College London (Aug'24)



Hierarchies in the academic life



2nd Workshop at University of Oslo (Feb'25)

3rd Workshop at University of Oslo (Sep'25)



## Learning

- Seed funds and Sandpit initiatives do more than spark dialogue, they build lasting partnerships.
- These collaborations have the potential to transform how we work and how we approach complex global challenges accross disciplines

## Outcomes



- Three articles are now in progress that will eventually provide policy recommendations:
- (1) one on the persistence of disciplinary hierarchies and the role of interpersonal power dynamics.
  - (2) one on the impact of institutional structures on collaboration.
  - (3) one on resisting hierarchies.