

International Transdisciplinarity Conference 2019 – Joining Forces for Change

Reflections by td-net's team members

« The questions of Institutions and the institutional anchoring of transdisciplinary research were taken up in numerous sessions. The role of universities was thereby discussed critically; while certain universities are taking innovative steps towards enabling ID/TD research, universities were generally perceived as not very flexible and their rigid disciplinary organisation was criticised as restraining ID/TD education, research and careers. Exploring ways to overcome these boundaries, renowned personalities representing international science policy institutions (OECD-Global Science Forum, International Science Council ISC) and innovative universities expressed their vision of transformations and encouraged young as well as established scientists in their search for new solutions. They encouraged the ITD-community to live according to the motto of the conference "Joining Forces for Change" and welcomed the foundation of the international ITD-Alliance. »

Theres Paulsen, director td-net and at ITD conferences since their beginning –
a perspective on institutionalisation of Transdisciplinarity

« In the presented td projects, a diversity of methods was used – from dragon dreaming to bayesian networks, from encompassing stakeholder involvement designs to specific tangible tools to foster collaboration. As much as this diversity is appreciated, as much efforts are needed to navigate through and further develop td methods. The keynotes made it evident: methods are essential to structure and document what happens when different – academic and non-academic - bodies of knowledge come together and new things emerge. But they also showed that it's not only about methods, it's also about changing the way you're thinking and acting, about creating safe, neutral spaces and facilitation competences. Or in other words: about becoming a reflective, transparent, risk taking, learning and unlearning, vulnerable super hero! »

Sibylle Studer, project leader for td-net's knowledge co-production toolbox –
a perspective focussing on methods

« I consider the ITD conference at Gothenburg as my very start into TD. Starting with a session about learning in the liminal space was thus quite meaningful – as it was about addressing experiences or a space in which the old reference systems and ways of being and acting are not valid anymore and the new ones are not clear yet. During the following days I was able to develop my own idea about TD, but at the same time I realized that there is still a lot of learning for me in the future - and that's great! What made and still makes my learning journey to TD easier is the fact that there are many shared concepts with sustainable development and even more with education for sustainable development, which is closer to my background and daily work. But there were also concepts that did not open to me, so there's still a lot to do for me to get fully into TD. I'm really looking forward to it! »

Yves Gärtner, project leader U Change (student initiative for sustainable development),
first-timer at the ITD conference 2019

« More than 250 participants from all continents joined forces for change at the International Transdisciplinarity Conference 2019 in Gothenburg, Sweden. The richness of experiences, knowledge, backgrounds and approaches enabled lively and fruitful exchange. The commitment of all community members was tangible in the record number of contributions, in workshops, sessions, plenaries, coffee-breaks and after-conference activities.

The quality, breadth and depth of the contributions and sessions was impressive, ranging from case-studies in research and education, meta-analyses of td-research, methods, methodological and theoretical advances, the emergence of a new profession of “transdisciplinarians” to the institutional level, where funders, research policy representatives and researchers addressed what is often referred to as the structural constraints for transdisciplinarity, like appropriate funding schemes, and the challenging question, how universities and public administration could transform to enable and foster transdisciplinary approaches.

To address such structural obstacles, and as an important step to further strengthen the communities' abilities to address the grand societal challenges, the Alliance for Inter- and Transdisciplinarity (ITD-Alliance) was founded at the conference. The Alliance aims at linking the growing but often dispersed networks, organisations and individuals, as well their initiatives, experiences and offers in transdisciplinary research and education. The Alliance is a home base for inter- and transdisciplinary institutions and individuals. It offers institutional and individual memberships, highlights the amazing work of the communities, enables to bring forward specific aspects of ID/TD in working groups, helps to find potential partners for research and education, and, by joining forces, it aims to leverage the power of ID/TD communities to become an even stronger voice in Research and Policy..

The strong call for Transdisciplinary approaches in the Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) that was launched by the United Nations at the same time as The ITD 2019 took place, as well as the full endorsement for the ITD-Alliance by Flavia Schlegel, the Special Envoy for Science in Global Policy International of the International Science Council are encouraging and a clear sign, that transdisciplinary research and education has to play an important role to address complex societal challenges. »

Tobias Buser, project leader capacity building and international network –
third time co-organiser of the ITD

The whole td-net team wants to express its warmest gratitude to the co-organisers *Merritt Polk* from the Gothenburg University School of Global Studies and *Henrietta Palmer* from Mistra Urban Futures with their teams, the conference partners and board members, and to all participants for making this conference a memorable and important event!