

Transdisciplinary research for sustainability

Regional/Thematic SuS Symposium

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Working Across Disciplines

The following definitions used in this presentation:

Multidisciplinarity:

- ☞ Different disciplines working together

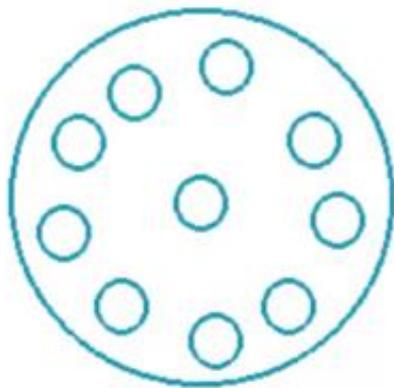
Interdisciplinarity:

- ☞ Integrating knowledge and methods from different disciplines: "synthesis approach"

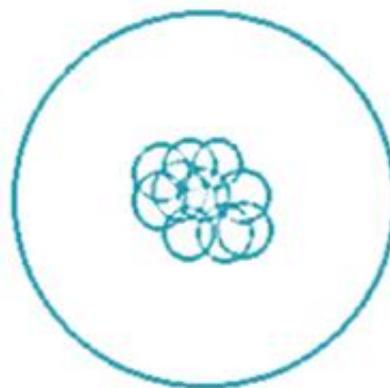
Transdisciplinarity:

- ☞ Creating a unity of intellectual frameworks beyond disciplinary perspectives – non-academic actors included

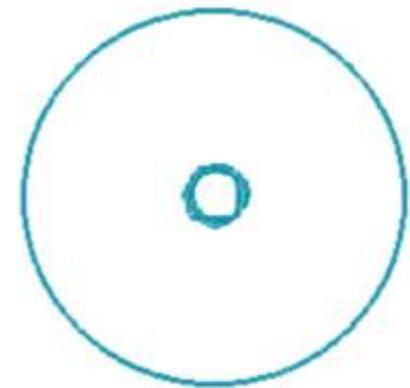
The difference represented graphically.



Multidisciplinary



Interdisciplinary



Transdisciplinary

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Transdisciplinarity basically includes cooperation between researchers and a debate with the society at large

Transdisciplinarity and research funding: some serious challenges

Assessing the projects:

Multidisciplinary projects:

- Well accepted, use of peer reviewers from different disciplines
- Comparatively “easy” to evaluate and identify “excellence”

Interdisciplinary projects:

- More complex, less established
- A “new” evaluation criteria in H2020

Multidisciplinary projects:

- No clear evaluation guidelines, resistance from “pure” academics
- Requires participation of users/stakeholders in the evaluations
- In its embryonic stage, e.g. not even mentioned in H2020

Experiences from RCN

- Reluctance from researchers – seen as obstructive to academic careers
- Reluctance among potential peer reviewers – not seen as “serious” research, feel on shaky ground
- Inability to understand “value” of other disciplines to some extent and especially when it comes to including “lay-people”
- No defined expertise in transdisciplinary approaches
- Reluctance among funders to adopt non-traditional paths to knowledge creation

Implementation of SDGs – a breakthrough for sustainability science?

Agenda 2030 calls for national reviews:

(states encouraged to) *“conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels, which are country-led and country-driven”*

Sustainability Science could be the answer to “how”, but

- Need to explain what concept entails – in national languages
- Need to be accepted as a full-fledged science by national authorities and funders, including national research councils
- Need to define how SuS should be implemented including
 - How to prepare calls
 - How to evaluate proposals
 - How to ensure interaction between academics and society at large

Possible paths for the future

There is a vast literature on sustainability science, but little concrete when it comes to its implementation.

Need to look at the work conducted among “pioneers” of SuS, e.g.

Future Earth

- Has adopted a SuS approach since its inception

Belmont Forum

- Example of how national funders can put together joint calls on a global level – “a global co-fund model”

Swiss Academy of Sciences

- Have developed a Handbook of Transdisciplinary Research

ICSU/ISSC

- Spearheading integration of natural, social and human sciences

Most urgent task: Define a SuS research agenda based on a transdisciplinary approach

Policy makers, research councils, industry and civil society must get together to

- Make SuS known among themselves and society at large
- Establish basic SuS frameworks
- Establish assessment criteria for SuS projects
- Establish multi-stakeholder panels
- Identify relevant indicators