

Report
about the

International Transdisciplinarity Conference 2017
11-15 September 2017, Leuphana University, Lüneburg, Germany

The Network for Transdisciplinary Research (td-net) was initiated at the first International Transdisciplinarity (ITD) Conference, which took place in Zurich in 2000. Between 2008 and 2015, td-net continued the tradition by organising another 5 ITD conferences. Each one aimed at strengthening and bringing together transdisciplinary communities.

This year, td-net had the pleasure of organising the conference in collaboration with the Leuphana University of Lüneburg. The newest building of the University and its fabulously distorted spaces, designed by architect Daniel Libeskind, offered an astonishing setting for the conference and seemed to reflect the many facets and angles of transdisciplinarity. The 2017 edition focused on interculturality and attracted around 250 participants. Moreover, nearly 100 people took part in 4 co-conferences held in Chile, Mexico, Uruguay and New Zealand. Representatives of these co-events were invited to contribute virtually to the discussions in Lüneburg via a livestream. This year's ITD Conference can also be described using some other numbers: 7 plenary talks, more than 30 parallel sessions, 20 special meetings and workshops, 27 inspiring posters as well as many side events and informal activities shaped 5 days of intense co-reflection and stimulating exchanges.

Together with the notion of interculturality, the idea of diversity was a major topic of discussion. Transdisciplinary research must, by definition, handle differences and heterogeneity. However, what was debated at the conference, in particular, was the diversity of the ways of understanding and applying the very concept of transdisciplinarity. The communities represented in Lüneburg were diverse in terms of tradition, fields and geographical contexts. Northern/Western perspectives on transdisciplinarity met Southern conceptions and sustainable development researchers shared the stage with philosophers and artists, among others. Given this constellation, the question of how to deal with differences became a central issue. Should unity and a common language between the multiple understandings be pursued? In her keynote, Gertrude Hirsch-Hadorn defended the idea of a "perspectival pluralism" and emphasised the inadequacy of a common language. In a similar way, many speakers argued for a multilingualism and an open attitude towards

plurality; what the German sociologist Anna-Katharina Hornidge defined as a “constructive approach to knowledge”. However, even if there was a certain consensus against a homogenisation of the different perspectives on transdisciplinarity, a need was expressed for more clarity. According to Gabriele Bammer, the transdisciplinarity landscape is characterised by a fragmentation, which should be overcome.

By enhancing the dialogue between defenders of multiple conceptions of transdisciplinarity and different methodological approaches, the ITD conferences aims to improve mutual knowledge and understanding to achieve more clarity. In the 2017 edition, curiosity, openness and willingness to learn about other perspectives were particularly palpable among the participants. Moreover, as a conclusion of the countless exchanges and ideas articulated during the ITD Conference 2017, an initiative has been brought forward to create an international inter- and transdisciplinarity organisation.

13. November 2017, Lydia Moreno