

# International Transdisciplinarity Conference 2017 in retrospect

## **27 mother tongues, shared objectives, but no common language**

From September 11-15, 2017, more than 300 scientists and practitioners engaged with transdisciplinarity worldwide. Leuphana University and the td-net of the Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences focussed on diversity in designing the programme of the ITD Conference 2017 to create a basis for dealing with heterogeneity and difference in transdisciplinary research. With the focus on interculturality, we could attract more contributions from diverse fields and methodological dimensions of transdisciplinary research besides the traditionally dominant group of researchers from transdisciplinary sustainability science and social-ecological research. Among others, representatives of the arts and design enriched the intercultural endeavour.

A core topic was language and concept work. In her keynote, Gertrude Hirsch-Hadorn dispelled the myth of a common language and elaborated on the constitutive meaning of different ways of knowing. Instead of envisioning uniformity, the key potential of transdisciplinary research is in working with differences. In a similar way argued Jakob Zinsstag, director of the td-net, in his welcoming note. Based on an example of research with nomads in Chad he highlighted the potential of concept-work. However, the 27 mother tongues were only heard once, when Rebecca Freeth welcomed the conference participants with a South African welcome: "SAWUBONA" ("I see you") that is followed by a "YES" ("I am seen") response.

It became very obvious throughout the panels that the discourse on transdisciplinarity isn't a homogeneous one. Sometimes it was difficult to create a coherent conversation. The panels also showed that there are neighbouring research fields such as (Participatory) Action Research, Science of Team Science and Integration & Implementation Science where similar research objectives and methodologies are applied.

The ITD Conference 2017 opened up a global dimension to the former dominantly European community and strengthened collaboration between partner institutions. The dominance of a north/western perspective on transdisciplinarity led to the desire to create a south-south network among researchers from Africa and Latin America. It

became obvious that there is a need to learn more about transdisciplinarity in societal conditions of young democracies and societies with strongly uneven development and poverty.

As organizers we are very impressed by the openness of all participants and the willingness to contribute to conditions for dialogue and learning. We could feel this attitude throughout the conference, and even on the last conference day, vibrant discussion continued in workshops and the forum of Leuphana's new central building. Many thanks to all contributors to make the ITD Conference 2017 a place for a critical engagement with transdisciplinary research and education!

The ITD Conference Team

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