ITD Alliance

Global Alliance for Inter- and Transdisciplinarity

Summary of Workshop on Key Messages to Relevant Actor Groups about TD Research

ITD Alliance General Assembly November 17/18, 2022

Content

Introduction

At its second General Assembly on November 17/18, 2022, the ITD Alliance held a very productive workshop with its members. Different subgroups discussed key messages about td research that they would like to express to research funders, to higher education and research institution leaders, or to national and international research policymakers.

First, each participant of the subgroup proposed one sentence as a potential key message for the respective actor group. Then the subgroup had a rich discussion about the different ideas. Finally, the subgroups presented their results in plenary to the other groups.

Research Funders
Proposed Sentences by participants (as written into the chat window)

– The current trend in community-driven science requires experts with skills, empathy, and understanding to engage with lived experience.

– Do you know about the rich resources (recommendations, debates, publications, criteria, etc.) in the itd community globally, look at ITD Alliance ?

– How do we persuade funders to invest time and money in developing meaningful research calls that draw on best practice in the funding and evaluation of ID/TD?

– Fertilize research with ITD approaches and teams, need inspiration? Join us at ITD Alliance

– Sustainability and resilience is a human concept that requires the input and engagement of all. Transdisciplinary capacity bridges academic and lived expertise to help achieve those joint goals in an informed and respectful manner.

– Tackling global problems requires inter- and transdisciplinary collaboration - ITD Alliance is a trustworthy global research-based solution provider and the best collaboration platform.

– We are doing professional development for funders to not just be able to support TD science, but also find reviewers and adapt project management practices.

– Investing in TD research can bring about more significant and lasting outcomes.

– As you are seeking to increase societal impact from the research you fund, emphasizing transdisciplinarity will contribute to your aim.

– If you are thinking about funding TD research (which many funders already are), we can help you in shaping a call and in establishing an effective selection process.

– ITD research is needed to address complex societal issues e.g. climate change, how do your funding rules enable ITD research

– For those already integrating transdisciplinarity as part of their funding criteria, investing in building capacity for co-design processes and establishing TD teams is important

Discussion

The discussion evolved around three main points:

- Terminology
- Capacity building
- Duration of funding

Terminology:

- Many funders emphasize that they are open to td research, but they seem to have a different understanding of what td research actually means.
- Alliance could help by offering orientation to funders that really want to support td but fail due to a lack of information.
- It is important to not only help the willing but also to pursue the ones who could do better and only advertise support for td research but never follow through with it.

⇨ Key message to research funders should entail a clear definition of what td research really is.

Capacity building:

- The knowledge on how to support td, apply for funds for td projects and evaluate those applications is out there. We need to find a way to get it to the funders, the applicants and the reviewers. The ITD Alliance could function as a knowledge broker.
- Review panels are one of the main problems. Reach out to other researchers that are thinking in a more traditional way, who give advice about whether a proposal should be accepted or not.

- TD specialists who are members of the ITD Alliance should register to become evaluators themselves.
- Some funders realize that communities that need the funding don't know how to apply for it. Try to support those groups.

⇨ It is very important to foster capacity building on td for applicants, funders and also reviewers. There is a lot of money going into td, but the capacity isn't there yet. We need to work on improving the quality of the projects.

Duration of funding:

- TD research takes a long time compared to traditional research.
- Educate funders that programs need to be longer or combine different funding over time. Get those funders together.
- This type of funding is not directed to stakeholders but to academics. Communities need short term funding with duration that lies below average because they need a quick solution, while academics need long term funding with a duration that does not exist yet. This dichotomy is a problem that funders face.

⇨ Need program officers who are willing to reform the current funding structures.

Additionally, it is important that there is not just one but many messages, depending on the funder that one wants to target. We need an offer to each of them that they cannot reject.

Also, the community should learn from already existing and well-functioning organizations, as they have a lot of experience with this type of work.

Lastly, the ITD Alliance could be a connection between all relevant groups for funding. It could publish a list of recommendations for all sides and try to get feedback from all groups on how well those recommendations work.

Higher Education and Research Institution Leaders
Proposed Sentences by participants (as written into the chat window)

- Academic career incentives are not designed to encourage (or even permit in some cases) faculty investment in inter- and transdisciplinary collaborations, and they need to adapt significantly to enable these important research and teaching efforts.

- Be creative to allow for academic publication of policy briefs in order to support academic researchers doing the policy making route and also surviving in the academic world.

- In a world that is running out of time, universities need to reimagine and implement their role as leaders and convey the competencies needed to speed up society's transformation towards sustainability.

- Higher education institutions need to include more transdisciplinary courses into study curricula to equip students with the competences required to deal with the increasingly complex problem situations of today's world.

- Offer courses to develop an understanding of ID & TD research, which provide spaces for experimentation, and support Young and intermediate staff financially to engage in these spaces.

- Institutionalize inter- and transdisciplinarity research by creating change in the organisations' culture and structure (going along with changes in the current academic reward structures).

Discussion

In a world that is running out of time, universities need to reimagine and implement their role as role model and convey the competencies needed to speed up society's transformation towards sustainability.

Incentives and financial support

- Reward system, incl. wider understanding of rewarded publications (incl. wider understanding of other types of outputs like capacity building, networks etc.)
- Allow young researchers to engage in td – but also senior researchers to gain more knowledge about concepts, methods, tools, practices etc. of TD
- allow experiments for thinking beyond silos (protected space for research AND teaching)
- Develop career paths up to permanent positions

- Redistribution of money within universities/institutes from 'silos' to td collaboration

⇨ Changing universities structures & culture

Drive transformations at universities and commit to societal transformations

- Universities should be role models for inspiring change => change universities, change what is taught, be an inspiring leader towards transformations
- Showcase worth and effects of td concepts, research approaches etc. => show successful approaches for thinking different and how alternatives could look like
- foster collaborative efforts for transformation (with strong link to the above)
- Investment in institute leaders and collaborative "engines"* help both give career paths for integrators and alleviate some of the stress on faculty who are within individual departments
  - * Centers, Institutes, cross-disciplinary bodies within universities that work across colleges or departments

National and International Research Policymakers
Proposed Sentences by participants (as written into the chat window)

- Addressing complex problems through transdisciplinarity needs the support from high governance instances

- Interdisciplinary research has the potential to tackle pressing global problems, but it requires more time than more traditional forms of research and this should be taken into account in how it is supported.

- Create Framework conditions for td Research, e.g., when negotiating Performance indicators with universities.

- Policy makers need to support professional development in global research perspectives for graduate students, postdoctoral researchers, and early-career researchers that enhance skills and leadership in international collaboration.

- Support and encourage the engagement of public sector actors in ITD activities (see OECD report: https://www.oecd.org/science/addressing-societal-challenges-using-transdisciplinary-research-0ca0ca45-en.htm)

- Push research evaluators to use explicit values, participatory approaches, and multiple and mixed methods.

- Acknowledge a diversity of research approaches and counter attempts that try to prize one kind of research as being 'real/hard/important ...' research above other research as being 'weak/less valuable ..' research

Discussion

For many of us, it is challenging to define research policymakers, their work, their priorities and needs. Policymakers write the big strategic programs. They work on science infrastructure plans, and capacity building funding at the macro level.

Policymakers often don't know that td exists and if they do, they don't know that it requires a different from of societal-/ science relationship compared to the traditional one where there is scientific research and then the results get communicated to the public.

⇨ The key message to policymakers is that complex problems require a different way of research policies. TD is one of them. Use that as a starting point for creating different research infrastructures which then leads to different capacity building and a different strategy in the long run.

Final Discussion in plenum

After all subgroups presented their results to each other, there was an engaged final discussion connecting all findings, and some fundamental questions came up that should be considered:

The capacity building aspect of the funders group are equally important across most actor groups and institutions.

There seems to be a certain overlap between messages to funders and to policymakers.

How do we communicate that we as people who work in td want to be acknowledged by the scientific community but not everybody has to work that way? How do we communicate that we appreciate the diversity within research?

What is the purpose of university? Is everyone they are training going into academia? Is it a loss, when many graduates leave academia and work in other relevant fields that are connected to td? They apply knowledge just in another way. Incorporating td in university training is important and there may be a range of possible goals, e.g. are nonacademic career paths appreciated in this concept?

Do not just tell funders what you need from them, ask what they need. It's a two-way street.

Very challenging to transform long existing structures like universities into td institution. What do they need to establish that?