



The Academia Europaea & The Wenner-Gren Foundations Conference

Crossing over to the future: Interdisciplinarity in research and higher education

Thursday 18 - Saturday 20 May 2017
***Wenner-Gren Center, Stockholm, Sweden**

Programme

Background of the conference

More than fifty years has passed since C.P. Snow in his famous Rede Lecture of 1959 (Snow, C.P. 1964) on the 'two cultures' stressed the duality of the natural sciences and the humanities as a seemingly self-evident reality organizing academic production of knowledge. Snow argued that the university was a divided community with radically different cultures and languages. As is well known, his views have been greatly quoted, challenged and criticized. However, over the decades the contemporary research landscape can no longer be mapped by simple dichotomies. Today the concept of 'interdisciplinarity' has slowly but surely come to the forefront of research interests and is seen as leading the way to answering major research questions, often known as the Grand Challenges, that mankind faces today.

When one views what at present comes most frequently under the heading of the Grand Challenges (climate change, water resources, multiculturalism, migration, energy supplies, etc.) the two most dominant characteristics of this kind of research are encapsulated in the concepts of *Inter/Multi/Transdisciplinarity* (in the following mentioned as *Interdisciplinarity*) and the *Global Dimension*. This stems from the global nature of the Grand Challenges themselves and from the fact that they do not easily fit within the traditional disciplinary boundaries. The complexity implied by *interdisciplinary* research challenges both research and education within all research domains. *Interdisciplinarity* in many ways poses challenges both to research and education in all domains of research. The complex nature of crossing boundaries and integrating different lines of thought brings to the forefront a reconceptualization of research itself as well as the education necessary for it. It is not possible to mention all the great thinkers that have stressed and developed the notion of 'interdisciplinarity' over the decades. However, it is necessary to mention the work of Jürgen Mittelstraß (1982), who advocates the necessity of transforming 'empirical knowledge' into 'orientational knowledge' which is by definition *culturally* defined and *socially* implemented. Also, the work of Nowotny, Scott and Gibbons (2001) on what is called Mode 2 knowledge production, that is, knowledge production seen as a process for which people come together in temporary networks to work on specific problems in the real world.

No matter whether ‘interdisciplinarity’ is knowledge-led (research driven), risk (crisis) induced or challenge-driven, ‘interdisciplinarity’, the basic requirement for scholarly engagement across all research domains is the capacity to adopt a fundamentally open and experimental approach to disciplines, research questions as well as their potential for addressing societal issues. Therefore, ‘interdisciplinarity’ not only aims at crossing the boundaries of disciplines, but is also a challenge for research governance, funding agencies and policy makers. It stresses the necessity of investing in high risk and curiosity driven research initiatives as key drivers for research advancement as well as the developing of new practices and criteria for evaluating research projects and results. However, gaps persist between the widespread rhetoric for support of interdisciplinarity and the realities of practice within the realm of research, the institutional environments in which this research should be carried out. Universities as a rule (with a few exceptions) have not implemented systematic reforms for lowering institutional barriers and creating favorable cultures for both research and education (Klein et al. 2001). With respect to this, experiment and risk often may be controversial principles in those environments that provoke constraints of a political and ideological nature, thus hampering the development of ‘interdisciplinarity’. The freedom to follow curiosity-driven research questions in relation to the Grand Challenges is not met with the same enthusiasm everywhere inside and outside the scientific community. What also has to be recognized is the fact that a particular concentrated effort has to be made to bridge the divide between the hard sciences and the Social Sciences and the Humanities (SSH). This is crucial if we are to address the many-layered problems inherent in the Grand Challenges. Thus, the necessity of raising the level of awareness to bridge gaps and work across boundaries is very much felt throughout the entire research community. However, in turn, this underpins crucial necessities such as mutual understanding and respect especially between the hard sciences and SSH.

Organising committee

Chair: Milena Zic-Fuchs, Zagreb mzicfuch@ffzg.hr

Erik De Corte, Leuven erik.decorte@ppw.kuleuven.be

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Thursday 18 May 2017

***When you walk through the main entrance of the Wenner-Gren Centre, please take to your left and go down the stairs.**

12.30-14.30 HERCULES Group meeting

14.30-15.00 Registration

15.00-18.00 **Welcome and Opening**

Britt-Marie Sjöberg, Chief Executive Officer of the Wenner-Gren Foundations, Stockholm
britt-marie.sjoberg@swgc.org

Sierd Cloetingh, President of Academia Europaea, Utrecht sierd.cloetingh@uu.nl

Presentation of topic and programme by the Convenor

Milena Zic-Fuchs, Zagreb mzicfuch@ffzg.hr

Plenary: Interdisciplinarity across science - challenges and opportunities

David King, Cambridge mdk@camkas.co.uk

Bruce Brown, Brighton bgb@brucebrown.plus.com

18.15-21.00 *Welcome reception with buffet dinner, 23rd floor*

Friday 19 May 2017

Please note: 30 minutes per presentation followed by 15 minutes for plenary discussion

09.00-12.30 **Session 1: Interdisciplinarity in research - obstacles and opportunities**

Chair: Erik De Corte, Leuven erik.decorte@ppw.kuleuven.be

09.00-09.45 Jürgen Mittelstrass, Constance juergen.mittelstrass@uni-konstanz.de

09.45-10.30 Rebekah R. Brown, Melbourne Rebekah.Brown@monash.edu

and

(to be announced)

10.30-11.00 *Coffee break*

Chair: Jan Reedijk, Leiden reedijk@chem.leidenuniv.nl

11.00-11.45 Verena Winiwarter, Klagenfurt Verena.Winiwarter@aau.at

11.45-12.30 Bert Weckhuysen, Utrecht b.m.weckhuysen@uu.nl

12.30-13.30 *Lunch*

13.30-17.00 **Session 2: From research to teaching - principles and programmes**

Chair: Svend Erik Larsen, Aarhus litsel@dac.au.dk

13.30-14.15 Pierre Lena, Paris pierre.lena@obspm.fr

14.15-15.00 Lars Engwall, Uppsala lars.engwall@fek.uu.se

15.00-15.30 *Coffee break*

Chair: Theo D'haen, Leuven theo.dhaen@arts.kuleuven.be

15.30-16.15 Carl Gombrich, London c.gombrich@ucl.ac.uk

16.15-17.00 Amir Muzur, Rijeka amir.muzur@medri.uniri.hr

17.15-22.00 *Departure from the Wenner-Gren Centre for boat trip and dinner*

Saturday 20 May 2017

09.00-11.15 **Session 3: Interdisciplinarity and academic career path**

Chair: Liesbet Geris, Liege liesbet.geris@ulg.ac.be

09.00-09.45 Erin Leahey, Tucson leahey@email.arizona.edu

09.45-10.30 Helen Bridle, Edinburgh helenbridlematernity@gmail.com

10.30-11.15 Hans Op de Beeck, Leuven hans.opdebeeck@kuleuven.be

12.00-13.00 **Concluding session**

Chair: Milena Zic-Fuchs, Zagreb mzicfuch@ffzg.hr

Panel members:

Rebekah R. Brown, Melbourne Rebekah.Brown@monash.edu

Helen Bridle, Edinburgh helenbridlematernity@gmail.com

Pierre Lena, Paris pierre.lena@obspm.fr

13.00 *Lunch*

Location:

Wenner-Gren Centre, Sveavägen 166, 113 46 Stockholm, Sweden, map: <https://goo.gl/maps/71egxpoe8C22>

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11/10/16/TM