

# Impressions from the Luxemburg Symposium Research Across Boundaries

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## Introduction

These reflections were captured soon after the symposium Research Across Boundaries with the aim of providing some first-hand reflections to contextualize the articles found in this special issue. The objective of the symposium was to foster “boundary-crossing research that facilitates (re)connections between theory and practice, facts and values, history and future, sciences and humanities, East and West etc.” As members of the scientific committee, we had been involved in supporting Markus Molz with the planning of the event and knew the many challenges faced in attempting to weave together a coherent program for such a range of contributions. From many months of work, re-work and last minute adjustments to solve the inevitable difficulties that came up for some presenters, we worked out the following program:

1. Three keynotes, two on the opening evening and one the following morning.
2. Dialogues in 24 parallel session papers over two days divided into four themes focusing on:
  - a. integrative conceptual frameworks,
  - b. their critical appraisal,
  - c. the connection between matter and mind, culture and consciousness, and
  - d. aspects of the historical societal transformation from modernity to transmodernity.
3. A musical interlude provided by Miha Pogacnik.
4. A Knowledge Café (KC) where presenters, observers, attendees and volunteers all engaged in sharing the insights from their participation in the above sessions, this organized around 12 questions (listed below) distilled by the organizers from the questions that emerged from each of the parallel sessions the night before the KC.
5. Open Space Sessions where participants self-organized around actions they felt motivated to pursue from their experience of the symposium.

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6. A final plenary session where closure was brought about through some dense reporting out of the Open Space sessions and rounds of gratitude expressions for the volunteers, organizers, and presenters.

You can find the full program and related materials here: <http://dica-lab.org/rab>

The present authors functioned as facilitators of sessions 2c and 2d (listed above) respectively, and participated as attendees in 1, 3, 4 and 6. Thus our observations are partial.<sup>3</sup> A mitigating circumstance is that sessions 2c and 2d in a way represented two major tendencies of the symposium: a strictly fact-related, scientific problem-solving approach on the one hand and a stimulation of an emerging higher collective consciousness, leading notably to better communication, societal transformation, participatory democracy, and egalitarian cosmopolitanism on the other.

## Reflections

The reaction of the participants to the keynote lectures<sup>4</sup> was generally favourable in that they set the broad scope and context of the work being undertaken in the symposium as well as presenting some examples of the kind of work necessary to accomplish the aims set out and certain traps to be avoided.

Regarding the parallel sessions, a major innovation of the symposium was that the papers were not presented by the authors themselves, but by the author of another paper in that specific session. This was one mode of boundary crossing in praxis. After some clarification of this novel approach, (almost) all the authors of sessions 2c and 2d were able to play by that proposal. The result was impressive. Not only had the presenters gone deeply into the 'foreign' paper they presented, but not infrequently they also made valuable proposals for its improvement. In fact, they often managed to reframe the work of their fellow panellists in such a way that new insights emerged for the papers' authors.

In addition, the dialogues brought to light some difficulties such as how to fit the lengthy time scales for complex interdisciplinary research into the time structure of Ph.D. programs, as well as funding such research. They also at times brought about heated engagement as to assumptions about orientations regarding core issues, which were quite illuminating.

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<sup>3</sup> Whereas we are satisfied with the symposium as a whole, there is one undertaking that regrettably did not work out. We indicate it here briefly so that others hopefully may do better. Full-time observers had agreed to cover all sessions, and to present the results of their observations at the final plenary session as well as in the special journal edition devoted to the symposium. Unfortunately, for various reasons, these results were not acceptable for publication. As we know now, the role of a participant-observer at such a gathering requires many competences to be present in one person. Specifically, in spite of a captivating dialogue going on between the participants-only, observers need to maintain a certain (emotional) distance so that their attention is not diverted away from capturing and calmly analyzing even paradoxical or contradictory statements.

<sup>4</sup> See articles from Nelson and Raman in this issue.

Looking at the subject matter of the presentations in session 2c, hopes for easier boundary crossing were raised notably by (a) Thomas and Brigitte Görnitz with their hypothetical notion of *protyposis*, condensed quantum information – posited as the grounding of both matter/energy and human consciousness, and these two therefore having the same ontological status – as well as by (b) Nancey Murphy's *nonreductive physicalism* integrating science, theology and philosophy of mind. The central argument of (b) is that humans need to be understood as composite neural systems, whose immense neural complexity is enmeshed in an immensely complex cultural environment, and as having much downward control of their own functioning. In a nutshell this is *whole-part constraint*. An illustrative example of such a constraint would be the chances of being dealt an ace from a 52-card deck. If it were a question of playing a lonely game with say, 13 cards, the statistical expectation would be one ace (*context-free* constraint). However, if four players are involved, the chances of the second, third and fourth player will depend on the number of aces already distributed. Here a *context-dependent* constraint is at work. Similarly, arguing that the electrical and chemical brain processes (bottom-up processes) fully determine human activities is not acceptable from a dynamical system's perspective: the whole-part constraint comes in here too and needs to be taken into account.

The other papers of session 2c to some extent were on similar lines as (a) above, viz. Harald Wallach's, and as (b), namely those of Michael Kimmel, Lutz Eckensberger and Tatjana Meira-Kochetkova. It is as yet an open issue whether (a) and (b) can in any way be 'combined' to become even more powerful as a hypothesis for facilitating boundary crossing.

Session 2d contained a series of papers that while in many ways striking variations on the core theme of the session (aspects of the historical societal transformation from modernity to transmodernity) also managed to provide critical engagement and extended clarification of particular issues. The first day saw Wendelin Küpers, Sue McGregor and Ronnie Lessem (with Alexander Schieffer) present each other's work through diverse and creative means. McGregor's presentation of Küpers' paper creatively reframed his presentation of his core thesis that future research on leadership and communication needs to break the largely univocal narratives presently being used. In turn, Küpers presented Lessem's proposal to fundamentally rethink and ultimately rework the design of a university and thereby its specific role in and for a particular society, and also for humanity in general. This was then supplemented by examples of prototypes already being created. Lessem used a narrative/ storytelling mode of presentation to engage McGregor's thesis that the already interdisciplinary fields of home economics and consumer studies could benefit from moving to a transdisciplinary approach. This would be accompanied by a shift in focus from the study of material consumption to the results of this overdriven tendency of human nature to dealing with human and ecological issues. The depth and diversity of this session created a lively set of dialogues during the session, and the final hour of open dialogue brought about a serious deepening of the inquiry into what lay underneath these three presentations/activities and what common elements could be gleaned to help move the larger symposium goals forward.

The second day of session 2d saw Mark Luyckx Ghisi, Irena Ateljevic and Enrique Dussel continue the presentation of the session theme. Ghisi began by presenting Ateljevic's thesis of how a transmodern paradigm is emerging. This emergence was shown through a number of significant bodies of literature all pointing to aspects of this phenomenon. Ateljevic then presented Ghisi's similar view of a transmodern/ post-capitalist society with a visual image to

orient her remarks. This was grounded in work with the EU in moving to a knowledge economy as an example of a post capitalist society. There was significant alignment of these two presentations, moving the collective conversation towards a synthetic view. Dussel then presented his own (he was only able to arrive that morning) extensive work on defining transmodernity. The breadth, scope and depth of his presentation enthralled participants and raised the level of collective understanding of both the term transmodernity and the session theme as a whole to a new level.

## Outcomes

Following these experiences, a major question arising is the relation between the two tendencies evoked previously, and to some extent epitomized by sessions 2c and 2d. More specifically, who singly, or in what combination of both, decides what the really important issues are, and what the criteria for the likely success of solutions proposed beyond empirical support?

Each of the parallel sessions was requested to come up with two questions each day. These questions were digested (along with dinner) by the scientific committee members to formulate a set of synthesized questions that seeded the Knowledge Café tables. After a great deal of processing the stimulating richness and diversity of questions provided, the committee came up with 12 questions. They were:

1. What conditions enable quality boundary crossing research dialogues?
2. What criteria can be used to assess the quality of inter/transdisciplinary boundary crossing research?
3. What role do ontologies, for example, hierarchical, flat or unified play in inter/transdisciplinary boundary crossing research?
4. How can we become more mindful of the ways metaphors/terminology shape boundary crossing research?
5. What are the relationships between science, philosophy, arts and other forms of human inquiry when pursuing boundary crossing research?
6. How do we determine adequate methods for boundary crossing research?
7. How do we recognize our blind spots, such as ignoring voices or theories from the periphery, when doing boundary crossing research?
8. What difficulties do we experience in doing boundary crossing research?
9. How do we support genuine dialogues that can transform modernity and co-create a conscious transmodern society?
10. What are the institutional supports required to enable boundary crossing research?
11. What kind of logics do we need to do boundary crossing research?
12. What further question do we need to ask?

Regarding question 11 (of which Helmut Reich was the KC recorder), there was general agreement that classical (Aristotelian) binary logic is insufficient for dealing with incompatible, paradoxical, seemingly contradictory concepts/ states of affairs. We need a 'logical' framework accommodating mutual acceptance and validation also in such cases, broadly speaking a post-formal logic. Participants discussed the matching of binary, dialectical, analogical, modal, fuzzy, and systems logic as well as that of relational and contextual reasoning (RCR) to the structure of

various problems. Also noted is that while for most participants logic pertains to rules for establishing valid arguments, others spoke of the logic of actions such as the logic of love or of slowing down living.

The Knowledge Café produced highly energized conversations among all in attendance. The final reporting saw the emergence of new levels of understanding of the core issues being faced. In the closing part of that morning participants were asked to cross the boundary from their intellectual engagement to attending to their affective states. This helped to shift and ground the energy of the morning.

The Open Space Sessions followed after lunch and led to a number of sessions where participants' passions enabled conversations of those interested in follow up activities to set the stage for the work of the symposium to continue. One list that came out of these sessions was as follows:

- Organizing a follow-up symposium;
- Creating an international network of scholars, practitioners and initiatives of transformative, transdisciplinary and integral higher education;
- Setting up an online reading circle about each other's inter-/ trans-/ meta-disciplinary writings;
- Developing a research program on self-transformation into a transmodern community/society;
- Creating links between inter-/ transdisciplinary academic journals;
- Editing a collaborative book on integrative frameworks.

Another list that emerged was to; (a) a new university for the future, (b) an inter-journal conversation, (c) a global reading circle, (d) a collaborative book proposal, (e) another research across boundary symposium, and (f) an international project to treat the question of the emergence of a post-/ transmodern society as a serious research project in its own right (to get it on the public agenda).

The closing plenary brought about a general sense of gratitude for the time spent together and the work put into making the event happen.

## Concluding Thoughts

In addition to the undertakings from the Open Space Sessions, the general project now would be to propagate the idea of boundary crossing together with suitable methods and its relevance in a world that is becoming more and more complex and interconnected, and to explore how best this can be implemented in practice in various spheres of human activity.

Such were our thoughts in the immediate glow of the symposium. Time has passed to now, and reviewing this in preparation for the publication of this special issue, I (Jonathan) would like to add an additional reflection. While many ideas for the future progress in relation to this project were shared, as is often the case the follow up suffers from dissipation of energies. Yet it is clear that the ideas spread and take root in many forms most often unknown to those who began them.

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However, one particular initiative that captured a good deal of interest and energy in the Open Space sessions was for creating a University for the Future, a ground up redesign of how such ideas could be put into practice. I have had varying degrees of involvement with this initiative, and wish here to point to it as an on-going effort to keep the spirit and ideas behind this symposium alive. You can find out more at <http://u4future.net/> .