



Development and Sustainability Science: The Challenge of Transdisciplinary Knowledge for Social Change

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The Department of Health Promotion and Development, UiB Global, and the Comparative Research Programme on Poverty (CROP) of the International Social Sciences Council (ISSC), all at the University of Bergen, plan a Workshop, leading to a book on the subject ***“Development and sustainability science: the challenge of transdisciplinary knowledge for social change”***. The Workshop and book are practical steps to forge a new international collaboration between the University and other national and international institutions. The goal is to work towards connecting social and environmental sciences for a definite purpose: enhancing the well-being of people and their environments where it is most needed, namely the places where severe poverty stubbornly continues to hamper sustainable human development. The need for effective action toward a greener and socially inclusive economy, contributing to equitable development has long been evident. The 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development states that "Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature". Yet health promotion in the context of sustainable development has faltered, especially in those parts of the Global South where poverty is greatest, as attested by the probable failure to reach the Millennium Development Goals and go beyond them producing structural responses to most pressuring global challenges. This failure calls not for resignations, but for redoubled efforts and especially for innovation in the ways in which we tackle health promotion in concert with sustainable development.

The 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development has set as a top priority the transition to “the green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication”. UNDP defines the green economy as “a system of economic activities related to the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services that result in improved human wellbeing over the long term, while not exposing future generations to significant environmental risks and ecological scarcities”. In this sense, it could be argued that a green economy shuns resource-intensive growth in favour of sustainable consumption and production in the world and, at the same time, is designed to improve access to clean and nutritious food, while providing education and a health-promoting environment and access to the health services that all people have a right to. However, it is worth noting in a critical approach to this concept that “several developing countries (for different reasons) do not consider a green economy intrinsically sustainable; nor is it considered intrinsically pro-development or pro poor” (UNCTAD, 2010).

The required transition calls for a new form of cooperation, which crosses traditional boundaries of human activities and scientific disciplines. Today, development is mostly compartmentalised, with economic, agriculture, health promotion, poverty elimination, human rights, environmental and other ‘helping’ communities working in parallel, despite the fact that the problems they seek to tackle are inextricably linked. This is also true of academia, with disciplines working mostly in isolation and ignorance of one another’s potential to contribute solutions across the silos. It could



be argued that compartmentalized sciences (and thus, the inability to connect) are possible causes behind the failure to provide clear scientific responses to the question of (extreme) poverty eradication and sustainable and equitable development. This workshop will therefore promote a transdisciplinary approach to extreme poverty eradication (with emphasis on health promotion), and sustainable development, to construct methodological and scientific means to deal with some of the most critical issues faced by humanity in the 21st century.

Human health is perhaps the key factor in the constellation of factors that are essential to sustainable development: health is vital for individual achievement and also for the stock of human capital that societies depend on to achieve sustainability in social, economic, environmental and cultural life. Health is inextricably linked to poverty: Poor people are much less able to recover from serious diseases, far more likely to fall ill due to shortfalls in clean water, nutrition, sanitation, clothing, shelter, cooking facilities, and education. Poor health strips people of the energy and vitality essential to cope with the demands of daily living. The transdisciplinary academic field of 'health promotion' is obliged, therefore, to forge new collaboration with other academic communities that work for sustainable development in general, and for poverty eradication, in particular. We urgently need expanded, intensified and ever more synergistic transdisciplinary applied scientific research, undertaken in partnership with public administrations and civil societies.

This is the challenge: even if health promotion in its modern form is highly transdisciplinary, it has not yet managed to bridge the gap separating those working for health on the one hand, and those working for other aspects of a green economy. Poverty studies also fall short in producing the kind of transdisciplinary approach needed to capture the complexity of poverty and to achieve its eventual elimination.

The seminar will focus on, but not be limited to, these issues:

- The disciplines in environmental science have succeeded in forging a new discipline, 'sustainability science'. What lessons learned along the way should we take on board as we seek to forge broad-based and critical transdisciplinary research that supports transitions to green economies or other social models conducive to social change towards sustainable and equitable development?
- How can poverty studies break out of the traditional disciplinary focus and limitations to embrace an expanded role for poverty researchers in transdisciplinary and critical research for social change towards sustainable and equitable development?
- The diverse cultures and traditions of the development-oriented academic communities – economics, sociology, psychology, social geography, applied anthropology, agriculture and land use, to name some – are barriers to achieving transdisciplinary research for the green economy or alternative socio-economic models. Which new arenas and ways of collaboration must be established in research environments to extract real synergy from the richness of the various disciplines?
- The study of factors that impede/foster transdisciplinary research is today a mature arena of research. What insights can be extracted from this knowledge base that can guide the way to the most innovative research for the green economy and alternative socio-economic models?



The workshop will bring together a maximum of 15 participants from across all university disciplines. This call for papers is open to all, although preference will be given to researchers based in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. Those presenting Workshop papers are expected to actively participate with presentations and in discussions of all the papers.

Participants are responsible for their own travel expenses and health insurance. Board and lodging will be covered. A limited number of travel grants will be assigned according to geographic origin and the relevance, quality, and originality of the submitted abstracts. In the case of co-authored papers, only one author may compete for a travel grant. The Workshop will be conducted in English.

The abstract should not exceed 500 words (one page) and must include: the title of the proposed paper and a summary of its theme, including its central argument and research question. In addition, a brief résumé (max. one page) clearly indicating your name, title, nationality, and contact information as well as a list of recent publications is required.

The abstract and résumé must be uploaded via CROP's webpage, starting early November.

DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION OF ABSTRACTS: Monday, DECEMBER 17, 2012

Accepted participants will be notified by the Academic Committee regarding format/guidelines for the **final paper**, which **must be submitted by Monday March 11th, 2013**. The final paper is considered the penultimate draft for a chapter contributed in the planned book. The workshop will provide inspiration and support in shaping the final product.

For questions in relation to the workshop, contact the organizers by e-mail at: **CROP Secretariat** (cropWS@uib.no); and UiB Global (post@global.uib.no).