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Notes from the Field

International Symposium

“Research Across Boundaries: Advances in Theory Building”

The University of Luxembourg

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For an intense four days (and for some, a fifth day), a cadre of world scholars (approximately 100 people) met at the University of Luxembourg to *explore and live* the process of research across boundaries. Founded in 2003, the University of Luxembourg was an excellent venue for this conference. The university is based upon principles of interdisciplinary, international and cross-cultural collaboration.

A website was created for the symposium, becoming a central hub for this boundary-crossing journey, <http://dica-lab.org/rab/>. The entire symposium was well documented (visually, audibly and in writing). The four-member Scientific Committee was led by Marcus Molz (Luxembourg) and also included Mark Edwards (Australia), Jonathan Reams (Norway) and Helmut Reich (Switzerland). They had a vision of advancing theory building through boundary-crossing research that facilitates (re)connections between theory and practice, facts and values, history and future, sciences and humanities, sciences and religion, East and West, et cetera. To that end, they invited representatives of an array of contemporary integrative frameworks and research practices. The goal of the symposium was to foster dialogues among them and additional participants through plenum, small-group, world (knowledge) café and open space sessions, in order to discover common concerns and stimulating differences regarding advanced boundary-crossing research approaches.

In more detail, twenty eight invited contributors (from five continents (20 countries)) prepared their thoughts for the symposium (three of them as Keynotes). These scholars were seen to be the vanguard of boundary-crossing researchers from around the world. With a compelling intellectual twist, the conference planners arranged for each contributor to present someone else's paper who was presenting in the same session - *to live what it means* to cross boundaries! I have attended conferences for over a quarter of a century - this innovation was a refreshing first. The intent was to instill dialogue and collaboration through embodied knowing. Presenters were tasked with becoming familiar with ideas from another discipline and sharing those with the original author and others attending the session. The papers are password-protected at the symposium's website, anticipating their publication in a special issue of the

Integral Review Journal. You can download the list of contributors and a 100-page book of abstracts at <http://dica-lab.org/rab/files/2010/06/Contributors-and-abstracts-Symposium-Research-Across-Boundaries3.pdf>

Within this document is a list of eight additional contributors who were unable to attend the symposium but did submit a paper (available at <http://dica-lab.org/rab/contributions/publication>). These contributors (from six countries) included Basarab Nicolescu and Julie Thompson Klein. The eight papers focused on a range of topics: knowledge and wisdom, disciplinary boundaries defined from a transdisciplinary perspective, relational and contextual reasoning, integrating science and the humanities, metaphilosophy as an integrative theory, developmental action inquiry, and integrating conceptions of human progress.

As well, a cadre of five observers from five countries were invited to attend. Over the course of four days, they shared their observations of how we were articulating the process and content inherent in boundary-crossing research. Their perspectives were intriguing, shaped by their contexts. Observers were from Russia, Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg and the UK. Finally, the seven-member Local Organizational Team ensured a smooth and seamless gathering. They are deserving of deep gratefulness. There is no doubt that the success of the symposium is attributable to their (syn)energy and professionalism, and tireless attention to details and people.

The symposium was launched on Wednesday evening with two keynotes—Ruben Nelson (Canada) and V. V. Raman (USA). On Thursday morning, Roy Bhaskar (UK) delivered a third introductory keynote. Then, during Thursday and Friday, the 28 papers were presented in four parallel sessions, organized as four themes: (a) integrative frameworks crossing multiple boundaries; (b) reflections on integrative frameworks; (c) matter and mind, culture and consciousness; and, (d) global societal transformations. People were asked to stay in their parallel session for both days so as to create an emergent community of learners and potentialities. At the end of both days, participants in the respective four sessions generated two questions (16 in total, eight each day) shared at day-end plenaries, and then used by the conference planners to prepare for the Knowledge Café on Saturday morning.

The conference planners arranged for Miha Pogacnik to provide a creative detour at the end of Friday - a musical boundary-crossing interlude. Miha is the Cultural Ambassador of the Republic of Slovenia. Using music (a transformative violin performance) and emergent artwork, he took us outside the boundaries of our prior conversations and seeded the Knowledge Café, open space and plenary sessions that occurred on Saturday. For a taste of what we experienced, treat yourself to <http://www.mihavision.com/>.

Indeed, on Saturday, we experienced an incredibly well facilitated Knowledge Café (led by Jonathan Reams, supported by the Local Organizational Team) whereby we engaged with 12 questions that emerged from the two previous days (teased out by the Scientific Committee on Friday evening). These questions bear repeating:

- What conditions enable quality boundary-crossing research dialogues?
- What criteria can be used to assess the quality of inter/transdisciplinary research?
- What role do ontologies, for example hierarchal, flat or unified, play in inter/transdisciplinary boundary-crossing research?
- How can we become more mindful of the ways that metaphors/terminology shape boundary-crossing research?
- What are the relationships among science, philosophy, arts and other forms of human inquiry when pursuing boundary-crossing research?

- How do we determine adequate methods for boundary-crossing research?
- How do we recognize our blind spots, such as ignoring voices or theories from the periphery, when doing boundary-crossing research?
- What difficulties do we experience in doing boundary-crossing research?
- How do we support genuine dialogues that can transform modernity and co-create a conscious, transmodern society?
- What are the institutional supports required to enable boundary-crossing research?
- What kind of logics do we need to do boundary-crossing research?
- What further questions do we need to ask?

At the end of the Knowledge Café, a scribe for each question prepared a one-pager of the essence of the 3-round conversation. Participants received these at the final plenary. I scribed Question 4 - how do we become more mindful of the ways that metaphors/terminology shape boundary-crossing research? Here is a hint of the flavour of the conversations. Metaphors are/have energy and have a life cycle - they form, serve and then lose power. Regarding their formation, it was suggested that there are limits to thoughts in our disciplinary, siloed minds. We need to rest our minds, empty them. Metaphors emerge through the emptiness. When they do, our minds become full of the new metaphor - *mindfulness* (we become mindful of the metaphor and its role in crossing boundaries). As well, people who are immersed in their own disciplines need a space for rest. They need to *unthink* (engage in just *being*). Through this process, they experience an aha moment wherein the metaphor emerges. Border crossing comes from the space of creativity where we *don't think*.

Through the use of open space technology (again facilitated by Jonathan Reams), the group wrapped up the conference on Saturday by taking responsibility for some form of future action around boundary-crossing research. These actions included, but are not limited 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).

On Sunday, 15-20 participants attended a post-symposium meeting designed to create a space for sharing information about on-going transdisciplinary/integral/transformative higher education programs related to boundary-crossing research. This event was framed as “a first emergent activity of participants at the symposium.” It was held at the Neumünster Abbey, a public meeting place and cultural centre located in the Grund district of Luxembourg City (downtown). The goal of the meeting was to come to know of each others’ initiatives and to explore possible synergies. I attended this meeting in my role as co-editor of the ongoing series about transdisciplinarity in higher education, in the *Integral Leadership Review* journal (with Russ Volckmann). Over 20 different initiatives (from more than 15 countries) were identified and briefly described followed by powerful networking over lunch. Ananta Kumar Giri (India) observed that Sunday was an opportunity for ‘mutual blossoming of integral work on the ground.’

The conference planners did an admirable job of ensuring *being, feeling and doing* from an integral perspective. They integrated theoretical, philosophical, methodological and experiential aspects of boundary-crossing research. They understood that the boundaries that need to be crossed include disciplinary boundaries as well as language, cultural, geographical, and experiential boundaries. In fact, they arranged for V. V. Raman to deliver a keynote on *The Variety of Boundary Crossings*. Participants left the conference appreciating that we need integral values, norms and ideologies as well as theories, philosophies and models. Those in attendance

were ever cognizant of the need to respect the *quality of the conversation* as people cross boundaries. In my session, we learned that it is necessary to become *organic intellectuals* who can *feel the change*. The conference was described as a threshold, a level or point at which something can start or cease to happen. Some people expressed great optimism and hope (a connection to our futures) and others expressed profound frustration at the inadequate pace of change needed to address the angst facing humanity. All agreed that the hard work cannot be done without learning how to cross boundaries.

For more information: <http://dica-lab.org/rab/>

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