

## **WERA 2026 FOCAL MEETING IN COLLABORATION WITH TERA-TAIWAN**

**15-18 October 2026**

**National Sun Yatsen University, Kaohsiung, Taiwan**

**Sub-theme 03:** Global Competencies, International Education, and Intercultural Learning

Individual Paper Submissions (**Oral Submissions**)

**Author:** Heike Molitor (Prof. Dr.) – Eberswalde University of Sustainable Development

**Title:** Transdisciplinary International Learning Lab (TILL) as a space for developing intercultural and global skills in the context of sustainability

**Research Overview:** The aim of the oral presentation is to introduce a transdisciplinary university format within the framework of the TRANSECTS (Transdisciplinary Education Collaboration for Transformations in Sustainability) project with biosphere regions/ reserves and to present the results/ findings of an evaluation (method: focus groups) of these learning laboratories.

**Purpose of Study:** TRANSECTS (Transdisciplinary Education Collaboration for Transformations in Sustainability) is a six-year research training partnership. The main aim is to train professionals, students and practitioners in transdisciplinary research and intercultural skills to collaboratively address sustainability challenges. TRANSECTS prepares graduates to be the next generation of sustainability change makers by enhancing professional, relational, and intercultural skills.

Part of TRANSECTS is the TILL (Transdisciplinary International Learning Lab), a research training program with biosphere regions in Canada, South Africa or Germany. TILLs provide international students with the opportunity to learn and apply professional, relational, and intercultural skills in the field. TILLs give opportunities to train and equip students in the skills required to work in Transdisciplinary Research setting and contribute this way, to the education of the next generations of change makers.

In 2024, the TILL brought together 18 trainees from diverse disciplines and different countries in Canada (Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region) to work alongside with the practitioners/ community partners. TILLs were developed to promote a research and practice community engagement (i.e. First Nations/ indigenous people).

The Transdisciplinary International Learning Lab (TILL) 2024 in Canada consists of a foundational course and an onsite-training. The five-part foundational course was designed to introduce to transdisciplinary research, Biosphere region context and intercultural readiness. In the Foundational Course, the idea is to begin equipping trainees with skills that they will draw on while at the TILL, as well as helping learners be more familiar with the host BR. Foundational Courses are taught by scholars and practitioners in preparation for the onsite portion of the TILLS, ensuring common key learning outcomes are pursued and vital contextual knowledge is shared as trainees start their cross-cultural field-based, learning experience.

Onsite, under mentorship of researchers, practitioners, and community partners, four international student teams were addressing a locally determined issue that was aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals and the research and development needs of Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region and community partners. Depending on student needs, research conducted through the TILL may form the basis of their project, thesis, or dissertation, or it may be a supplemental learning experience. The Transdisciplinary International Learning Lab (TILL) were evaluated to measure the project goals.

Envisioned learning outcomes of the TILL are:

- Demonstrate understanding of the motivation for and theory behind Transdisciplinary (TD) research,
- Identify and apply principles for effective collaboration with shared responsibility holders in a Transdisciplinary (TD) research setting,
- Identify and employ appropriate methods that engage shared responsibility holders,
- Demonstrate/ model good practices for fostering a culture of respectful, inclusive, and effective collaborative teamwork.

**Research Methods:** The specific objectives of this study were: Understand how to develop individual hard and soft skills by creating a positive transdisciplinary learning environment and how to enable the selection and delivery of the right content and tools?

To find this out, a qualitative approach was adopted. The main instruments were focus group discussions (FGDs) with different groups of actors of the TRANSECTS project:

- the biosphere regions host team,

- the coordinators,
- the mentors,
- the instructors and
- the students.

The focus group discussions were recorded. The Recordings were transcribed then. All discussions were based on questions prepared by the international evaluation team of the TRANSECTS Team (all countries were involved, gender issues were taken into account, and there was a mix of different backgrounds).

**Results and Discussion:** According to many of those involved, both students and the implementation team, the TILL 2024 was a very positive and stimulating experience. The students had learned in three areas: connection and context, personal development and academic learning.

Success factors and challenges were identified and conclusions drawn for the next TILLs. It is important to understand the TILL not as a single event, but as part of a series and an expanding network. It should therefore be seen in its entirety and what emerges from it: a network that will grow every year, connecting future and present transdisciplinary research and biosphere reserves/ regions specialists.

**Keywords:** Transdisciplinarity, sustainability, intercultural, higher education, biosphere region