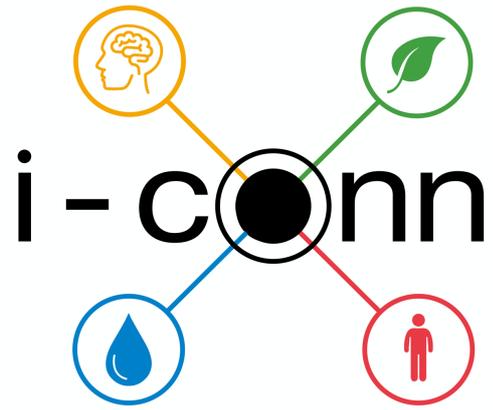


i-CONN Network



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Transdisciplinary Protocol, D6.1
November 2020

i-CONN: Protocol on Transdisciplinary Practice

1. Project Summary

i-CONN is a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Innovative Training Network (ITN) project funded by the European Commission, under their H2020 programme. The network consists of 10 Universities and three partner organisations across Europe, and brings together scientists from Astrophysics, Computer Science, Ecology, Geomorphology, Hydrology, Neuroscience, Systems Biology and Social Science. The goal of i-CONN is to train a new cohort of researchers specialized in the developing field of Connectivity Science who will be capable of developing interdisciplinary approaches to connectivity across a range of disciplines and real-life applications in the next five to 10 years.

2. Context on Transdisciplinarity

There has been a growing emphasis on transdisciplinary research, in which the boundaries between disciplines are crossed, as well as those between the academy and other social and political spheres, to enable a wide range of actors to be involved in the design, development and delivery of research (Wesselink 2009; Lang et al., 2012; Renner et al. 2013; Bracken et al., 2014). Such approaches are increasingly encouraged due to two related rationales: firstly, they are likely to make research more useful to academics, policy makers and the wider public; secondly, they enable the research that is undertaken to be more salient. In this way the involvement of public and non-academic experts in the research process increases the relevance of the research to them, widens the range of knowledge upon which the research draws (e.g. local and professional) and explores the perspectives of non-academics.

The emphasis placed on bringing non-academics into the research process is symptomatic of the recognition that relevant knowledge is not only contained within the academy. For example, there are many equally legitimate sources of knowledge and evidence that need to be drawn upon to inform management of environmental problems (Wynne 2003; Petts 2007; Lidskog 2008; Collins and Weinel 2011). This understanding is linked to an increasing expectation that policy makers should be using the best available evidence when making decisions (Campbell et al. 2011; Jolibert and Wesselink 2012), which includes a variety of perspectives, recognising that evidence, ideas, arguments and framings all matter in the governance of problems (Jasanoff 2003; Owens 2010; Macnaghten and Chilvers 2012). Recognising knowledge as a social process means acknowledging that expertise is conferred upon individuals in different and multiple circumstances (Jasanoff 2003; Wynne 2003; Irwin 2006). Such forms of research are, therefore, part of complex struggles over “what” counts as relevant knowledge and subsequently “who” then possesses such knowledge to inform policy debates within the public arena (Jasanoff 2003; Eden et al., 2006; Bracken and Oughton, 2013).

Transdisciplinary research is at the heart of the i-CONN network, which brings together varied academic perspectives with non-academic expertise to further Connectivity Science, build the capacity of Early Stage Researchers (ESRs) and more experienced researchers alike and apply developments in Connectivity Science to real life applications. Our Transdisciplinary Protocol outlines the procedures and processes to ensure this approach is fully embraced throughout the project.

3. Objectives of the Transdisciplinary Protocol

The objective of the Transdisciplinary Protocol is to support the i-CONN network to create the capacity required to effectively deliver our transdisciplinary approach. It is crucial that all those involved in the project collaborate to develop and learn from our transdisciplinary practices and ensure we deliver the outcomes stated in our project proposal.

The protocol identifies the stages of dialogue, the meeting schedule, required inputs and the expected outputs of the transdisciplinary activities undertaken in the research.

There are many transdisciplinary activities outlined in the original proposal, such as secondments to partners which are not repeated in this Protocol. The purpose of this protocol is not to draw out all of the transdisciplinary activities throughout the whole of the i-CONN project, but to specify how to use meetings, workshops and training events to build transdisciplinary capacity of the project team, learn from our experiences and share best practice beyond the project.

4. Events and data collection

The following suite of activities will be used to collect data and reflect on our transdisciplinary activities.

4.1 Training events

We have a suite of training events at the heart of the i-CONN network where ESRs and network members are building transdisciplinary capacity and capabilities. Following each event, we will collect feedback on the event including reflection on transdisciplinarity.

4.2 ESR Blogs

ESRs will write two blogs per year reflecting on their growing transdisciplinary capacity. These blogs will focus on different aspects of transdisciplinarity depending on the topic and interests of the ESR. A schedule of blogs will be compiled that maps onto the communications strategy. Blogs will be disseminated via the i-CONN website.

4.3 Secondments

Secondments are built into i-CONN for ESRs, supervisors and partners to co-learn and co-develop research and applications. These secondments will be important opportunities for knowledge exchange and translation. Both ESRs and hosts will be interviewed by Louise Bracken (Chair of the Transdisciplinary Management Group (TMG)) at the end of each secondment to reflect on transdisciplinarity.

4.4 Annual Meetings

Annual meetings provide an important opportunity where all members of the network will come together to share our research, update each other on ESR projects and explore future opportunities. The Annual Meetings will host a session on transdisciplinarity to reflect on our existing capabilities, but also explore future opportunities. The sessions will be designed by the TMG and will include activities to chart research findings and capture learning and solutions.

5. Management and reporting

Durham University will oversee the Transdisciplinary Protocol and Chair the TMG. The TMG will ensure that the activities and data collection are coordinated and undertaken¹.

The TMG will provide an annual report to the i-CONN Management Board and report to the consortium at the Annual Meeting.

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