

## Profile of the Transacademic Interface Manager (TIM)

The University of Graz Field of Excellence "[Climate Change Graz](#)" offers a highly attractive research environment, with world leading faculty across the relevant disciplines involved from its schools of social sciences and economics, natural sciences, environmental sciences, and the humanities. The field's work on sustainable solutions requires dialogue with and integration of experts and stakeholders from all areas of society as part of the research process. We seek professional development of this interface.

"Working towards sustainable solutions requires involving professionals and stakeholders from all sectors of society into research and teaching. This often presents a challenge to scholars at universities, as they lack capacity and time needed for negotiating different agendas, languages, competencies, and cultures among faculty, students, and stakeholders. [...]" (Brundiers et al., 2013)

The transacademic interface manager (TIM) will support participatory sustainability and climate change research. Below, we outline the task portfolio of a TIM within the specific Uni Graz/Climate Change environment and specify the capabilities we think a TIM needs to possess in order to operate successfully.

### *The Transacademic Interface Manager at Uni Graz – Field of Excellence "Climate Change Graz"*

The research in the Field of Excellence (FoE) Climate Change Graz is not only of internationally recognized outstanding scientific quality, but also has a high societal relevance and is therefore linked to the transformation to a climate-robust and low-carbon society. The FoE engages not only in knowledge transfer by bringing research results to society, but also strives to develop and follow a clear strategy towards stakeholder engagement and improved science-society interactions. This includes the involvement of a so-called 'transacademic interface manager' (TIM).

As a '**boundary manager**' the TIM will strive to establish trustful long-term relationships, extending beyond the duration of single projects, with partners from the economic, political and cultural sector (professional level) in order to build a community of practice. She/he will be expected to actively promote such relationships and networks (initializing and maintaining a functional and continuous **process of collaboration**).

Part of this will also be the work as a '**facilitator**' organizing and moderating meetings and workshops with stakeholders. This will also extend to taking part in the **co-production of knowledge**, by supporting joint research projects, especially with companies, public institutions and social groups. As a '**project manager**' the TIM will support not only the development (preparing the project by identifying and recruiting participants as well as orienting and framing the research by generating an overall stakeholder engagement strategy) and implementation of transdisciplinary research projects (developing the research questions and methodological approaches as a common endeavor between science and society or companies, observe and learn about implementation, plan engagement events, translate research results into an inclusive vocabulary and help to valorize project results). She/he will also consistently follow up with stakeholders to evaluate outcomes and their actual use, and prepare the ground for future collaboration.

As an '**expert on transdisciplinary research**' the TIM could facilitate **discussions on this hot topic** in the Field of Excellence as well as provide lessons learned from the development and implantation of transdisciplinary projects. The engagement in transdisciplinary research is not only a growing demand in all areas of research funding, but also comes with certain challenges on the **methodological** and institutional level. Attention also needs to be drawn to the underlying institutional structures in which participatory sustainability research takes place, as well as in the assessment of research excellence. Based on first-hand experience, the TIM is foreseen to carry out both own research (up to a fifth of her/his time), and to act as an '**educator**' providing basic input for

the development of **teaching modules** on inter- and transdisciplinary research that are gaining more and more importance in the curricula at the University of Graz.

The core functions we desire imply that this position does not focus on 'communication to' (as is the focus of already existing positions at Uni Graz) but rather on '**communication with**'. The focus is on stakeholder network management, and the **tasks are twofold: external** (build up and maintain networks) **and internal** (prepare the FoE for these collaborations).

### **Skills**

The need for a TIM arises from the widely acknowledged challenges of collaborations across different communities of knowledge and values. Such collaborations demand bridging different worldviews, ways of knowing, motivations, interests, and power positions, which often are incommensurable or even conflicting. In addition, practical aspects strain the collaboration, including time constraints, mandates and rewards, as well as individual capacities and skill levels. TIM can be described as an individual with different task portfolios and capacities to cope with these challenges.

In order to engage with stakeholders, the TIM would be expected to be **familiar with both cultures** (within and across) as well as to have a sense of accountability to all parties. She/he will need to be able to navigate the different needs, expectations, and cultures between academic researchers and diverse stakeholders. In the role of the boundary manager, the TIM needs to manage collaborative problem solving across different communities of knowledge and to facilitate flexibility in ways of thinking, to unlock collaboration by shedding light on choices and activities (deconstruction), to support responsiveness among participants and fair voting rules (facilitation), and to ensure transparency and trust (mediation), which has shown to decrease controversies and increase effectiveness of the co-construction of knowledge in a collaborative way (hybridization). Enhanced moderation experience will support achieving these tasks. This should also help to create and maintain **mutual ownership and accountability** among project participants.

Furthermore, the TIM will have a strong focus not only on the research process but also on the research outputs in form of **actionable knowledge** and research **impact** on sustainability and societal transformation. In order to communicate research results the TIM will be expected to have sustainability literacy and a good overview of the **research landscape** and to be able to **integrate knowledge** and reinforce a solution-oriented perspective. The role as an expert and educator will further require experience in transdisciplinary research and a basic methodological knowledge of transdisciplinary processes, as well as basic teaching skills.

### *References:*

Brundiers, K, A. Wiek and B. Kay (2013), The Role of Transacademic Interface Managers in Transformational Sustainability Research and Education, *Sustainability* 2013, 5, 4614-4636; doi:10.3390/su5114614