

Report on the International Symposium "Research Across Boundaries"

Elke Fein

"In the coming century, there will be an urgent need for scholars who go beyond the isolated facts; who make connections across the disciplines; and who begin to discover a more coherent view of knowledge and a more integrated, more authentic view of life."

Ernest Boyer, American educator

The University of Luxembourg recently hosted the international symposium "[Research Across Boundaries – Advances in Theory-building](#)" conceived by members of the [Institute for Integral Studies \(IFIS\)](#). It took place from 16-19 June 2010 and attracted more than 60 researchers from all continents and across the range of academic disciplines. The overall aim of the symposium was to bring representatives of major integrative and boundary crossing research streams together for in-depth dialogues. Many of them have not been aware of each other before and seized this unique opportunity to explore common ground and to offer mutual critique.

Major advances in integrative theory-building across the boundaries of paradigms, disciplines, cultures and contexts have indeed been made in many places in recent years. Various theory-driven attempts have been deployed to bridge, among other boundaries, the sciences and the humanities, different cultures, societal needs and the dynamics inherent in research itself. The contemporary boundary-crossing frameworks discussed on the symposium ranged from quantum theoretical inspirations to cybernetics and complexity approaches, from action theory to cybersemiotics to integral meta-studies. The philosophical underpinnings covered meta-paradigms like transdisciplinarity, integral theory, critical realism, and participatory and emancipatory worldviews. These frameworks proved to be able to shed light on one another and on specialised research.

The core of the symposium was made up of keynotes delivered by senior scholars Roy Bhaskar, V. V. Raman and Ruben Nelson followed by four parallel dialogue sessions. The sessions were focusing on:

- Integrative Frameworks Crossing Multiple Boundaries
- Reflections on Integrative Frameworks
- Matter and Mind, Culture and Consciousness
- Global Societal Transformation.

One of the elements which contributed particularly to making this event an extraordinary and outstanding one in the field was the immediate practical realization of the general idea of a "*scholarship of integration*" in the processes of the symposium. For instance, the four intensive panel sessions were organized and facilitated in a way which more insistently than usually encouraged dialogue and appreciative exchange between the participants. Each dialogue session ran over two full days. Three papers were discussed in each session per day. The authors of the papers did not present their own paper, though, but the paper of another author, trying to provide an appreciative summary and interpretation before commenting on more specific issues. After this cross-presentation the author of the respective paper was invited to complement. This approach resulted in heightened mutual awareness, a spirit of cooperation and respect, and unusually rich and focused discussions of the issues at stake. Each of the two days of intensive dialogues was concluded by a plenary that was giving even more room to the search for cross-fertilization of the various approaches. Based on the dialogues the more than 30 symposium papers are currently under revision. The final, peer-reviewed versions will be published as a special issue of [Integral Review](#) in 2011.

A particular highlight in conclusion of the second day of dialogue sessions was a musical input by violinist Miha Pogacnik. Born in Slovenia, Pogacnik looks back onto a career as a professional concert musician and is now working mainly – yes – with business people. The deeper aim of his seminars is not just listening to his music but *learning to listen deeply* – and to observe what happens (or does not happen) when we listen (or do not listen) in particular ways. In a sense, Pogacnik’s performance was an impressive, yet very different contribution to the overall topic of crossing boundaries. It was a mixture of comedy show, highly professional violin solos, improvised scribbles on a flipchart and well-informed remarks on consciousness research, personal development, society and culture. In no time and with humorous easiness Pogacnik brought the audience out of their usual mental “operating system”, taking it into some sort of “trans-state” that allowed to leave behind the usual boundaries and frames of academic identification.

The third day of the symposium was dedicated to harvesting the fruits of the dialogues that took place in the parallel sessions. This was done, first, through a knowledge café format in which all attendees were focusing on eleven of the most debated questions of the symposium, plus an additional 12th open question asking what else should be asked. The results of these small group discussions were carried to an open space forum. The open space was giving the possibility to co-create projects and activities reaching beyond the symposium. Among the initiatives proposed were:

- Organizing a follow-up symposium;
- Creating an international network of scholars, practitioners and initiatives of transformative, transdisciplinary and integral higher education;
- Setting up an online reading circle about each other’s inter-/ trans-/ meta-disciplinary writings;
- Developing a research program on self-transformation into a transmodern community / society;
- Creating links between inter-/ transdisciplinary academic journals;
- Editing a collaborative book on integrative frameworks.

Another special feature of the symposium was the invitation of colleagues acting as observers and commentators of the discussion processes within the four parallel sessions and during the symposium as a whole. On various occasions, these observers were asked to share their impressions which often enough opened up new dimensions and sometimes gave impulses to new discussions and developments.

It goes without saying that this kind of event would not have been possible without the support of various volunteers and funders. A team of volunteers of the University of Luxembourg were in charge of organisational support. Another team of international volunteers was recording the sessions and is now collaborating on extracting key dialogues from the recordings. They will be published alongside the other contributions. The event was funded by the [Unit for Sociocultural Research on Learning and Development \(LCMI\) at the University of Luxembourg](#), the [Faculty of Language and Literature, Humanities, Arts and Educational Science \(FLSHASE\)](#), and the [Luxembourgish National Research Fund \(FNR\)](#).

Last but not least the initiator and coordinator of all of these unfolding streams of intelligence, knowledge, and capabilities has to be mentioned: [Markus MOLZ](#), a young researcher and founding member and governance board member of the [Institute for Integral Studies](#) was the driving force behind this event. The impulse to realize this symposium came from his observation that many colleagues in many places are working in similar directions under different labels without much awareness of each other’s work. In the preparatory work Markus was supported by a scientific committee including:

- [Mark EDWARDS](#) PhD, Lecturer in Business Ethics at the University of Western Australia, International Advisory Board Member of the [Institute for Integral Studies](#),

Author of "[Organisational Transformation for Sustainability: An Integral Metatheory](#)" (Routledge, 2010) and of many other publications on integral meta-studies.

- [Jonathan REAMS](#) PhD, Associate Professor at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, International Advisory Board Member of the [Institute for Integral Studies](#), and Editor-in-chief of the peer-reviewed journal [Integral Review: A Transdisciplinary and Transcultural Journal for New Thought, Theory and Practice](#).
- [Helmut REICH](#) PhDs in physics, engineering and psychology of religion, Professor emeritus, Senior Research Fellow emeritus, Institute of Educational Sciences, Fribourg University / Switzerland, Former researcher at CERN, International Advisory Board Member of the Institute for Integral Studies, Author of "[Developing the Horizons of the Mind: Relational and Contextual Reasoning and the Resolution of Cognitive Conflict](#)" (Cambridge University Press, 2002), and of many other publications on cognitive and religious development.

For more information on the event see: <http://dica-lab.org/rab/>.

Elke Fein, PhD, is a political and social scientist. She is co-founder and president of the Institute of Integral Studies (www.integral-studies.org) and a researcher at the University of Freiburg, Germany.