

Scenes from inter- and transdisciplinary research

A cartoon exhibition on how to make sure that integration fails

By Lisa Deutsch, Sabine Hoffmann, Christof Stückelberger

Despite the promising potential of inter- and transdisciplinary (ITD) integration for addressing urgent wicked problems it remains a challenge – for both project leaders and team members – to make integration happen in practice. Based on empirical insights from an accompanying research project to three ITD research programs in Switzerland, we – two researchers and a professional cartoonist – created a series of cartoons to capture common scenes from ITD integration processes.

The cartoon series is based on the results from a reversal technique, which we employed in a workshop setting in several ITD program contexts in order to approach the emotionally charged challenge of integration from a different and ‘lighter’ angle. Participants were asked to brainstorm concrete behaviors, attitudes, and strategies to make sure that ITD integration fails in their programs. Capturing the results of these workshops in a series of cartoons, the exhibition provides action-oriented knowledge for project/program leaders and team members about how to actively hinder integration in practice.

However, the exhibition does not intend to stop there: it invites visitors to reflect upon the displayed scenes from ITD integration and think about how they can be modified or reversed in order to allow integration to happen. Overall, the exhibition presents a visual and humorous take on the challenges of ITD integration and provides a space to digest frustrating experiences via the best medicine: laughter.

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The creators

- **Lisa Deutsch** is PostDoc at Eawag (ITD Group, Department Environmental Social Sciences). The cartoons are based on her PhD thesis entitled “Practicing integration in inter- and transdisciplinary research: The role of enabling conditions and integrative leadership” at Eawag and ETH Zurich
- **Sabine Hoffmann** is group leader of inter- and transdisciplinary research at Eawag (ITD Group, Department Environmental Social Sciences). The cartoons are based on her extensive experience in leading inter- and transdisciplinary integration processes in projects and programs in Switzerland
- **Christof Stückelberger** is a professional illustrator and cartoonist, and teaches visual design in Switzerland

The research behind the exhibition

- Deutsch, L., Bjørnsen, A., Fischer, A., Hama, M., Zimmermann, N., Zurbrugg, C., Hoffmann, S. (2025): **Herding Cats – Integrative Leadership Strategies in Inter- and Transdisciplinary Research Programs**. In: Sustainability Science
- Deutsch, L., Pohl, C., Bresch, D.N., Hoffmann, S. (2025): **Creating favorable conditions for inter- and transdisciplinary integration – an analytical framework and empirical insights**. In: Global Environmental Change
- Hoffmann, S., Deutsch, L., Thompson Klein, J., O’Rourke, M. (2022): **Integrate the integrators! A call for establishing academic careers for integration experts**. In: Humanities and Social Sciences Communications