



ETH Medal for Lisa Deutsch

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Topics: Society | Climate Change & Energy | Organisation & Staff

Sociologist and political scientist Lisa Deutsch was awarded the ETH Medal for her doctoral thesis written at Eawag and ETH Zurich. Her research demonstrated how interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research can be successful and how theory and practice can be effectively combined in research.

Every year, ETH Zurich awards the ETH Medal for outstanding master's and doctoral theses. One of this year's medals went to Lisa Deutsch for her doctoral thesis entitled "Practising integration in inter- and transdisciplinary research: The role of enabling conditions and integrative leadership". The ETH Medal was presented during the graduation ceremony on 23 January.

Interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research in practice

Societal challenges such as climate change, sustainability and pandemics are complex and cannot be easily addressed. In her doctoral thesis, Lisa Deutsch shows that it is not so much a lack of experts that is needed, but rather effective collaboration across disciplinary boundaries (interdisciplinary) and between science, policy and practice (transdisciplinary). For interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary (ITD) integration to succeed, it must be proactively promoted and led.

Suitable enabling conditions, integrative leadership and supportive methods

Based on qualitative accompanying research in three large ITD research programmes and networks in Switzerland between 2020 and 2023, Lisa Deutsch analysed how integration processes can be designed in concrete terms and what are enabling or hindering conditions. Her results show that the interplay of three factors is crucial: suitable enabling conditions, integrative leadership and supportive

methods. "Often, the focus is on just one of these factors. I was interested in examining their interaction and deriving concrete approaches for action at various levels," says Lisa Deutsch.

The three accompanying research programmes and networks

(1) ITD research programme "Extremes" at the Swiss Federal Institute for Forest, Snow and Landscape Research (WSL).

(2) Cross-sector network NCCS (National Centre for Climate Services, administrative office: Federal Office MeteoSwiss) and its ITD research programme "NCCS Impacts"

(3) ITD programme "Wings" (water and wastewater innovations for on-grid solutions) at the Eawag water research institute

Her doctoral theses makes it clear that enabling conditions must be created at several levels – from individual team members, programme managers and directors to programme design and incentive structures in institutions to funders and decision-makers in science policy. Lisa Deutsch also found that integrative leadership plays a key role, for which sufficient resources and integration expertise are needed. Successful leadership of ITD programmes means more than coordination and moderation: it includes not only supportive contributions, but also creative and scientific contributions, as well as actively addressing a variety of leadership challenges. In addition, the thesis presents insights into the application of integrative methods such as the "Theory of Change" to ITD research programmes and discusses how these can help to facilitate and implement integration across interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary boundaries.

Cartoons and a nominated short film illustrate the results

Lisa Deutsch also illustrated her findings with the illustrator and cartoonist Christof Stückelberger and Eawag research group leader Sabine Hoffmann in a series of cartoons entitled "How interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary integration will fail for sure". The scenes depicted provide interdisciplinary food for thought in a humorous way. They invite readers to rethink their own research behaviour and discuss with team members how ITD research can be jointly and successfully implemented in practice.



DENY EARLY CAREER RESEARCHERS ANY COMPETENCIES

Cartoons: How interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary integration will fail for sure. Scenes from interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research. [To the Cartoons](#) (Cartoons: Lisa Deutsch, Sabine Hoffmann, Christof Stückelberger)

In addition, the animated short film "Verhebets? Ein ressourcenorientierter Apéro" was produced in collaboration with other young researchers from the Wings research programme and nominated by the Global Science Film Festival in the category "Best Short Film 2023". It explains the potential of resource-oriented urban water management and answers frequently asked questions and concerns of key stakeholders.

Animated short film "Verhebets? A resource-oriented aperitif"

Overall, Lisa Deutsch's doctoral thesis combines theory and practice and provides concrete, action-oriented insights for anyone who wants to strengthen interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research and make an effective contribution to solving future societal issues. "I was particularly impressed by the enthusiasm and dedication with which the programme leaders participated in the regular focus groups. This space for reflection made it possible to incorporate findings from the accompanying research into the ongoing programmes at an early stage – rather than waiting until the end of the project, when they might potentially disappear into a drawer."

The work was carried out as part of the Eawag Wings programme in the Eawag Inter- and Transdisciplinary Research Group (Dr Sabine Hoffmann) as well as the Transdisciplinarity Lab (Prof. Christian Pohl) and the Weather and Climate Risks Research Group (Prof. David N. Bresch) at ETH Zurich. Lisa Deutsch currently works as a staff member and project manager

for the Department of Health and Environment of the City of Zurich.

Cover picture: ETH Zurich presents Lisa Deutsch with the ETH Medal for her doctoral thesis, which she wrote at Eawag and ETH Zurich.(Photo: Sabine Hoffmann)

Publications

Deutsch, L. (2024) Practicing integration in inter- and transdisciplinary research: the role of enabling conditions and integrative leadership, 145 p, [doi:10.3929/ethz-b-000698963](https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-b-000698963), [Institutional Repository](#)

Deutsch, L.; Pohl, C.; Bresch, D. N.; Hoffmann, S. (2025) Creating favorable conditions for inter- and transdisciplinary integration – an analytical framework and empirical insights, *Global Environmental Change*, 91, 102963 (15 pp.), [doi:10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2024.102963](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2024.102963), [Institutional Repository](#)

Deutsch, L.; Björnsen, A.; Fischer, A. M.; Hama, A. M.; Zimmermann, N. E.; Zurbrügg, C.; Hoffmann, S. (2025) Herding cats: integrative leadership strategies in inter- and transdisciplinary research programs, *Sustainability Science*, 20, 95-115, [doi:10.1007/s11625-024-01585-4](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-024-01585-4), [Institutional Repository](#)

Deutsch, L.; Belcher, B.; Claus, R.; Hoffmann, S. (2021) Leading inter- and transdisciplinary research: lessons from applying theories of change to a strategic research program, *Environmental Science and Policy*, 120, 29-41, [doi:10.1016/j.envsci.2021.02.009](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2021.02.009), [Institutional Repository](#)

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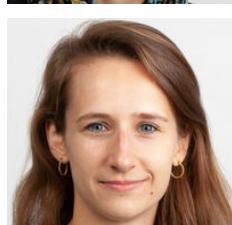


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