



Akademien der Wissenschaften Schweiz
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Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences

td-net for Transdisciplinary Research,
a project of the swiss-academies

PRESS RELEASE

Give urine separation a chance

NoMix toilet wins scientific award of 75'000 Swiss francs

Berne, November 27, 2008. **This year's *swiss-academies award for transdisciplinary research* goes to the project *Novaquatis: A New Approach to Urban Water Management*. With its urine source separation (NoMix) technology, the project paves the scientific and technological ground for innovation in the area of water protection. The project's visionary approach is met with enthusiasm and approval. It encourages other researchers to leave conventional paths and to enter new territory.**

NoMix? No problem! The toilets at the Eawag, the Swiss Institute for Aquatic Science and Technology in Dübendorf are worth a visit and easy to use. Especially constructed for urine source separation, the principle is simple, just a little different: in the front, the urine is collected and then locally stored, all the rest goes to the back where faeces and toilet paper gets transported to a central treatment plant as in as with any other toilet.

Separate treatment of wastewater opens new possibilities

The advantages of the NoMix technology in comparison with ordinary toilets are numerous: smaller wastewater treatment plants, protection of water from nitrogen and phosphorus, and the recycling of nutrients as fertilizer in agriculture. These advantages speak in favour of a large-scale implementation of the system, especially in fast-industrializing countries like China where the overfertilization of lakes and coastal waters due to household wastewater has reached an alarming rate.

An exemplary project for transdisciplinary research and practice

Novaquatis owes its success to a combination of disciplinary competencies and transdisciplinary methods. Moreover, a lot of time was dedicated to reflexivity, especially during the period of problem framing (the initial phase of the transdisciplinary research process), which is a crucial component of transdisciplinary research. During this decisive phase, researchers from various disciplines as well as actors from society at large enter into dialogue in order to identify and then structure a problem. The wide range of questions of the Novaquatis project were organized into nine disciplinary as well as inter- and transdisciplinary work packages. Four pilot projects were carried out in private homes and in public buildings. In the process, an exemplary combination of conceptual work, approaches from the social sciences to foster societal acceptance as well as use of technology took place.

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However, even though the NoMix technology is highly accepted by society and the advantages are obvious, it is by no means certain that it is going to be automatically implemented on a large scale. There are still many obstacles to be passed. Chief among them is the scepticism of the sanitary industry about the market potential of this technology. In the follow-up project the Eawag will therefore focus on the potential of various new and decentralized approaches to the treatment of urine-based nutrients. The award money will support his endeavour. It goes without saying that the follow-up project will again be transdisciplinary, employing and developing innovative social-scientific methods and seeking to collaborate with stakeholders from industry.

Further information

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The ***swiss-academies award for transdisciplinary research*** is the largest award given by the Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences. The Call is launched biannually by the td-net for Transdisciplinary Research. The prize sum of 75'000 Swiss francs is donated by Stiftung Mercator Schweiz as a part of their generous support of the td-net.

The Award Ceremony takes place on 27 November at 5 p.m. within the framework of the Transdisciplinarity Conference in Zurich at the Collegium Helveticum (ETH and University of Zurich). The laudatio is held by Dr. Barbara Haering (board member of the ETH).

Science in the service of society

The association of the «Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences» includes the Swiss Academy of Sciences (SCNAT), the Swiss Academy of Humanities and Social Sciences (SAHS), the Swiss Academy of Medical Sciences (SAMS), and the Swiss Academy of Engineering Sciences (SATW). Their collaboration is focused on foresight, ethics and the dialogue between science and society.