



Akademien der Wissenschaften Schweiz  
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Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences

td-net  
Network for Transdisciplinary Research

PRESS RELEASE

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**swiss-academies award for transdisciplinary research**

## **Research awards for exemplary transdisciplinary projects**

Bern, 9 September 2015. *EPFL-based «Green Density» project wins coveted CHF 50,000 science award. Furthermore, two young scientists working at the University of Geneva and the Swiss Federal Institute of Aquatic Science and Technology receive CHF 10,000 awards for their respective transdisciplinary investigations. Professor Marcel Tanner, former Director of the Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute, is honoured for his abiding commitment to interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity in the sciences.*

The «award for transdisciplinary research» is the most generously endowed award conferred by the Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences. The purpose of the award is to honour science that steps out of the laboratory, engages the perspective of scientists working in various disciplines and often includes non-academic players in the research process. The Network for Transdisciplinary Research (td-net) of the Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences issued a public call to researchers in all disciplines to submit award applications in two categories. Research conducted at the interfaces of disciplines and directly referring to an application is still met with disregard in the Swiss science system.

### **Intense competition for the main prize**

Space for housing is scarce, few are interested in making sacrifices when it comes to comfort and sustainable development remains a political mandate. The «Green Density» project is the first educational research project centring on architecture/ sustainable neighbourhoods to win the CHF 50,000 swiss-academies award for transdisciplinary research. The project was initiated and conducted by professor Emmanuel Rey, director of the Laboratory of Architecture and Sustainable Technologies (LAST) at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne (EPFL). The new and comprehensive approach to systematically including various dimensions in planning processes has already set new standards in the education of future generations. The experiences gathered in the Bern District of «Waldstadt» will be expanded upon in the future – for instance, in Yverdon-les-Bains and in Lausanne West.

The recognition that comes with the award is shared by a team of about a dozen dedicated individuals from various laboratories at the EPFL and private enterprises. Thanks to a public exhibition and the publication of a book geared to experts and laypersons

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alike (see below), the research results have been disseminated far beyond the borders of a scientific community.

Two other projects were also nominated for the main prize. The team behind professor Weingartner at the University of Bern submitted a compelling project entitled «MontanAqua» that addresses the subject of water scarcity in the Alps and that was carried out in the framework of the National Research Programme NFP61 «Sustainable Water Management». For their work, the researchers enlisted the help of various local actors active in the area of water-resource management. They jointly examined development scenarios and alternative approaches to adapting the existing water-management practices.

Led by Dr. Kai Udert of the Swiss Federal Institute of Aquatic Science and Technology (Eawag), the team conducting the second nominated project VUNA (*Valorisation of Urine Nutriments in Africa*) investigated new approaches to wastewater treatment in Africa. Together with the city administration of Durban, they developed a sanitary system that is both affordable for the population and produces valuable fertiliser for local farming communities. Moreover, water pollution caused by nutrients and pharmaceutical residues is prevented.

### **Promising young academics**

Young scientists are also taking new approaches and going beyond the confines of intra-disciplinary scientific inquiry. Dr. Kaspar Burger (University of Geneva) impressed the jury with his multifaceted perspective on early child education, upbringing and care. It warrants mention that Burger's work doesn't only focus on children, but also addresses the impact that various forms of childcare have on other areas of society. In his doctoral research study, he makes use of various scientific paradigms and research methods drawn from the field of education, psychology, sociology and study of literature. Dr. Sabine Hoffmann at Eawag has analysed the various processes of synthesis within the National Research Programme NFP61 «Sustainable Water Management». By systematising and describing methods of knowledge integration, she contributes to making the management of transdisciplinary research professional. Researchers involved in other collaborative projects are certain to profit from Hoffmann's recommendations and descriptions of the advantages and disadvantages of the corresponding methods.

The two young scientists each received CHF 10,000 awards for their interdisciplinary studies.

### **Honouring personal commitment**

Individuals who have committed themselves in the course of their professional careers to the establishment of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research are important role models in the scientific community.

Prof. Dr. Marcel Tanner has worked for many years to reform the scientific system. As the head of the Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute (Swiss TPH), he helped a Swiss scientific institution gain international acclaim. He was one of the first to introduce cutting-edge disciplinary research to transdisciplinary projects, promote a culture of interdisciplinarity at the Swiss TPH and initiate new research projects in close contact to the local population throughout the world. With his international engagement in global research partnerships, Marcel Tanner has given transdisciplinary research a new dimension. The intercultural exchange among experts of various, equally valuable knowledge systems that he has promoted has helped to create a great added value through mutual learning, which allows for meeting the challenges associated with global change.

Book reference:

Emmanuel Rey (Ed.): Green Density

Lausanne : Presses polytechniques et universitaires romandes, 2013, 192 pages.

<http://www.ppur.org/produit/640/9782889150212/Green%20Density>

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### Further information

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The «**swiss-academies award for transdisciplinary research**» is the most generously endowed award conferred by the Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences. The call has been launched biannually since 2003 by the Network for Transdisciplinary Research (td-net). The award is presented in three categories: «distinguished achievement», «early career achievement» and «life-time achievement». Mercator Foundation Switzerland supports the Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences to promote transdisciplinary research. 75,000 Swiss francs are dedicated for the prize sum. Further information on the award you will find here: [www.transdisciplinarity.ch/e/Award](http://www.transdisciplinarity.ch/e/Award)

### Award Ceremony

September 9 at 11h45, Congress Center Basel, room «San Francisco»

Within the framework of the International Transdisciplinarity Conference 2015. Welcome address by Dr. Guy Morin, president of the government of the canton of Basel Stadt

The **Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences** are an association of four scientific academies in Switzerland: 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. In addition to the four academies, they comprise the centres of competence TA-SWISS and Science et Cité as well as other scientific networks.

The Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences network the sciences regionally, nationally and internationally. They represent the science communities disciplinary, interdisciplinary and independent of institutions and disciplines. Their network is long-term oriented and dedicated to scientific excellence. They advise politics and society in science-based issues that are relevant to society.