# Partnering for Change: Link Research to Societal Challenges
Video Transcript

## Upscaling transdisciplinarity through societal learning

[Prof. Dr. Stephan Rist] Transdisciplinarity co-creation normally happens in the context of face-to-face communication. Involved actors, for example, are representatives from public administrations, researchers, private companies, political parties, and civil organisations engaged in promoting environmental concerns, issues of social justice, or human rights. All these different groups of actors might have different and sometimes conflicting views on a topic.

Let's take, as an example, two conflicting views about the effects of climate change on artificial snowmaking in the southern Swiss Alps. Arguments against artificial snowmaking might be: the sustaining of mass tourism, the use of scarce water, soil compaction, and the fact that we herewith only combat the symptoms instead of the causes of climate change.

Arguments in favour might be: the attraction of tourists, the creation of employments, the maintaining of social life in rural areas, or the fact that tourism brings investments which pay for roads, water, and energy provision.

A first challenge in this process relates to the fact that the involved actors often do not only have different views on the topic, but they are also holding different power positions. This is illustrated in the power-interest-matrix. For example, the power to influence the decisions about artificial snowmaking is much higher for tourism operators and hotel owners than for environmentalists or visitors interested in soft tourism, often living outside the local context in which decisions are taken.

How can we avoid that processes of co-creation of knowledge reflect these power relations? If not considered, co-creation of knowledge could easily contribute to the consolidation of existing power asymmetries. How can we assure that the voices of all participants are heard equally, regardless of their power positions?

This is a first fundamental challenge of transdisciplinary co-creation of knowledge. Research on co-creation of knowledge has proven to be successful in overcoming the 'power challenge' when it triggers social learning processes. Social learning represents communication and interaction at the micro-levels of social organisation.

Social learning processes create room for joint reflection and democratic action, in which the power relations among participants are replaced by the 'power of the most convincing argument'. Consequently, evaluating to what degree transdisciplinary co-creation of knowledge enables effective social learning is an important quality criterion. It shows how effective we are in addressing the 'power challenge' of transdisciplinarity.

A second fundamental challenge refers to the question: what can we do if the possibilities of local actions alone are not enough to really find a satisfying solution? An example would be when local actors privilege artificial snowmaking despite the presence of opposing opinions coming from outside the local context. This challenge can be addressed by linking social learning processes at micro-level with societal learning processes at macro-level.

This happens when social learning leads to collective action that aims at changing social, political, or economic institutions and power relations defined beyond the local context. This is often the case when local progress cannot be made without changing laws, rules, and regulations existing on behalf of regional, national, or international private or public entities.

An example that often helps in these cases is the engagement of local groups that start allying with other local, regional, and national organisations willing to help in changing societal institutions more generally. In such cases, the resulting societal learning processes often opt for increasing the democratisation of decision-making, integrating the local with the regional, national, or international levels.