**Q&A from plenary discussion**

**How to find the people to reach out to?**

Your Uni, faculty or institute has an ombudsperson (at least one), and an equal opportunities officer; contact them in case you do not feel comfortable reaching out to your supervisor; they will also be able to direct you to helpful groups, whether it’s parenthood in STEM, LGBTQI aspects, (di)stress, mental load, fears …and so much more. I spoke to my doctor (much too late) as I was in and out of contracts between AWI and ZMT, did not really feel I was belonging anywhere, and also I did not want to burden my direct colleagues being so busy themselves… (find the error). As important in my view is a professional network of like-minded people – being asked by a colleague whom you really respect and look up to collaborate, and then being able later to also ask in return. It is a difficult and often too long journey to arrive at a place where one does not have to work for nor with assholes – but it really pays off. Gut feeling and pure luck included… and courage.

**Did you consider becoming a professor (permanent position)?**

Yes, I did and still do. I have no habilitation (somewhat dusty German ‘qualification’ about which the angloamerican world chuckles) but I have what is called ‘habilitation-equivalent’ qualifications. I applied to a few professorial positions, got shortlisted and invited for three (one in Sweden, one part-time in Norway, one in Germany), but never got selected. In interdisciplinary sciences there are often not as many open positions as in conventional faculty streams, and in the marine social sciences especially, when there is an opening, we can be almost sure that we know more than half of the applicants ☺. Yet, I keep trying, but I know that after 50, chances will decrease. The part of moving with the entire family is of course also something to consider.

**What drives you through everything? How/why do you still persists in science?**

Luck. Stubbornness. Small successes. Amazing islands. But above all – the most amazing colleagues.

Well, the system spat me out in between, but the scientific curiosity and questioning did not really let go of me, and maybe here I can come back to the first question – building networks that come and feel natural. Back ten years, I was almost convinced there is no place + space for me in science, and that I would have to find other ways to connect with and protect the ocean. Then I met this young postdoc at one conference, she was about to go to the same island in Fiji where I had spent so many months during my PhD, and we clicked and discussed, and a couple of years later ended up submitting a large (and fortunately successful) grant proposal together. So we were lucky in a way, but I do think there are these colleagues for each one of us. Yet, to me, it still feels fragile, like a dream that could end anytime; so far it has not, but it’s like the love of your life saying “I had the best time of my life with you and will never be as happy as I was with you” … and then leaving you anyways, just to go off with some younger, more beautiful, clever, brighter, more energetic Schatzilein (sorry for the slight cynism).

**What do you think about... : Is it true that as woman starting a postgraduate degree after age 35? It's too late? It's a waste of time?**

No, this is not at all too late, and definitely not a waste of time. I am strongly convinced of the tremendous value of lifelong learning (where else would I be otherwise…), and in my job I collaborate with many people from the most diverse backgrounds. Some have been teachers or farmhands, engineer, tax experts or technicians, or even a prison social worker, before deciding to go into (marine) sciences. If you do not answer these questions with Yes yourself (given that we ourselves are among our fiercest opponents), who are others to tell you so. It will be more difficult maybe, as you maybe already have (had) a different life, far from studying and reading and reading and reading, and to find a job will potentially remain difficult for a few more decades… but then again – the best time to start is always now ☺.

**How to start from scratch (0) on a topic that interests you, if you have worked for 15 years on something that does not fully satisfy you?**

Reading and reading and reading. And getting in contact with the people about whom you read, and whose research you find interesting. Try to exchange ideas with them and possibly establish a pathway to collaborate, e.g. with a research internship at first, or a Masters thesis, or a PhD – or a side entrance such as scientific diving training. It can help to keep working for a while part-time in the job that does not satisfy you, if it pays the bills, until you can find firm ground to stand on, in the work topic that really drives you.

**Could you describe your transition from pure ecological/biological sciences to inter/trans disciplinary sciences? Are there steps you recommend to begin entering this field of work to ECRs?**

Protecting the oceans means understanding human activities in/on and uses of this salty lung of our planet. And hop – already you are knee-deep in interdisciplinary thinking, complexity and research. Studying marine biology was at the time the closest I could get to this – even though at the time only interdisciplinary in the sense that we had courses in zoology as well as botany and chemistry, etc. … . My focus on small-scale fisheries and coastal zone management brought me closer, when I started talking to resource users, and learning participatory approaches.

Think about some of the questions driving you most – and then think which knowledge you need to answer these questions, and who can provide such knowledge, from where you can gain such knowledge – this is what leads you to consider interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches. There are many interdisciplinary journal, articles, books by now, which did not yet exist ten years back, let alone during days where most academic curricula were drafted.

I found this one to be helpful: Oeberg, G. (2011). Interdisciplinary Environmental Studies: A Primer. Wiley-Blackwell.

As academic colleagues, I found it super-useful to reach out to Geographers, where I immediately was welcomed and felt like home somehow – as intrinsically interdisciplinary discipline. Always welcoming ideas from other environmental sciences in the widest sense, i.e. incl. human-environment interactions.

**Thank you so much for your inspiring talk. Do you have any tips to convince people that the interdisciplinary aspect is important? How did you overcome those difficulties?**

Hm. Good and difficult-to-answer question. (Also cf. answer to previous question)

Actually, if it would not be for the stiffness of academic administration and structure, one would not need to convince anybody about the importance and usefulness of interdisciplinary research and cooperation. I think about this on the same level as explaining to people that human actions matter for the health of our planet. It should not be necessary anymore. And ideally, you find and work with people who do not need convincing anymore. There are many of us ☺!

Interdisciplinarity is no panacea, but it is important - everywhere where complex problems need to be tackled and solutions need to be found fast. And indeed, sustainability itself is an interdisciplinary concept.