

Towards competence-oriented learning in rural development: Transdisciplinary Student Team Investigation in Mexico, Colombia, Nicaragua and China

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Abstract: *Transdisciplinary research approaches are gaining ground among the efforts of universities to fulfil one of their central tasks investigating societal problems and contributing to solutions. In parallel, there are ongoing debates and trials on more competence-oriented concepts of university education. In the Latin-American – European network “Rural Society, Economy and Natural Resources - Integrating Competence in Rural Development” (SERIDAR) an integration of both approaches has been tried. Scientists and practitioners in rural areas have jointly elaborated research problems, which were then investigated – among other formats - with interdisciplinary teams of students within study programmes related to rural development and agricultural sciences. These projects had dual purposes: conveying essential professional competences to students and generating knowledge for and with participating rural actors. Evaluation by these actors was very positive; students and faculty gave a favourable assessment but also found various challenges and different solutions for them. This article provides academic staff with insights into the didactic concept, tested and adapted in several countries according to local conditions, among them Mexico, Colombia, Nicaragua and China/Germany. Results of a comprehensive evaluation and systematisation process on local and international level are presented, with conclusions on factors and conditions necessary for the implementation and integration of transdisciplinary and problem-based student team research into university curricula as well as on this format as an element of collaboration among universities and societal stakeholders. It contributes to the discussion and reflection among lecturers and universities on competence-based curriculum development and on strategies to increase regional relevance of academic education.*

Keywords: *transdisciplinary education, learning processes, competence-oriented curriculum development, systematisation, transdisciplinary student team research*