



# THE-GLOW

Transdisciplinary Higher Education  
for Global Wellbeing

## Reflection Guide Transdisciplinary Course Development

*Learning experiences from the first three courses  
and tips for the next cohort of participants*

August 2024



Co-funded by  
the European Union

Erasmus+ CBHE  
Project Ref: 101081819  
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Three course development teams worked on designing three 2-week, 2-credit courses with the aim of training transdisciplinary professionals through active learning strategies. Complex global problems underlying the SDG targets, UN green growth guidelines, and the national policy context in Thailand require transcending disciplinary borders to address them effectively. History has shown us that monodisciplinary interventions for complex or “wicked” problems have not been effective.

Our approach for training course developers and teachers in designing courses, learning materials, and active learning strategies for master’s students included a 4-day on-site workshop in Bangkok followed by online group meetings. In the workshop, we discussed the concept of transdisciplinarity, developed course objectives, active learning strategies, assessments according to active learning principles, and course evaluations by students and faculty. In the online group work, we further detailed the course content, including schedules, who would teach what content, field visits, assessment plans, and how to evaluate the courses. This resulted in the development of three 2-credit, 2-week courses:

**Titles of the courses:**

1. Transdisciplinary Approach to Health and Wellbeing
2. Gender and Climate Change Intersections: A Transdisciplinary Approach
3. Transdisciplinary Approaches to Zero Hunger

The developed courses ran for the first time between May and June 2024.

There have been several learning points from the experiences during the development and delivery process. These lessons, along with identified needs and aspects to consider, are outlined below.

As we navigated this process, we found that practicalities need to be decided on early in the process (e.g., prior to recruiting developers/teachers and beginning course development work). Therefore, it is important to discuss and determine the following during these early stages:

- A clear and realistic overview of time investment
- Dates for the workshop need to be planned in advance, considering the availability of participants and leaving sufficient time for course development after the workshop
- A schedule for the online group meetings following the training workshop and relevant plenary sessions

- Pre-specifying areas of focus for each of the three courses (and sub-groups)
- Number of credits per course
- Where the courses will take place physically
- What exactly blended learning means in the context of this project and its courses
- Expectations and what course development involves through active communication (particularly prior to/at the early stages of the development process)

*Note:* Considering these points, a Terms of Reference working document has been drawn up for the next iteration of training, and course development, and delivery. This will be used for the recruitment of the second cohort of developers/teachers and facilitate the course development process.

The importance of dedicating time and space to examine each of the key elements of the courses (e.g., transdisciplinarity, the SDGs, framing/analysis/intervention, the food-water-energy nexus, and considerations of health and well-being) during the on-site workshop also became apparent from the experiences of the first iteration.

*Note:* Time and space to examine these elements have been built into the planning of the next workshop.

Course developers/teachers of the first batch of three courses have identified attributes that they feel are helpful for engaging in the process of course development/teaching transdisciplinary courses:

- Active listening and openness to/high acceptance of different views among the developers
- Awareness among the developers that they were exploring something totally new (transdisciplinarity) and using improvisation, common sense, and experience for developing the course
- Openness and humbleness when confusion or disorientation occurred among the developers
- Ability to draw on the rich and diverse backgrounds in the course development team

Participants further reflected on some challenges inherent in the process of developing and delivering these transdisciplinary courses and aspects that need to be kept in mind by future cohorts of participants. These include the following:

- Need to consider time constraints in terms of balancing the additional work/tasks required for this project with other existing responsibilities.
- It can be challenging to align schedules for different people working in different institutions.
- It is important to know there is an administrative load that will come with participation and be prepared for this. Experiences of the first cohort can help.
- Participants have to navigate transdisciplinary work (and challenges therein) themselves while they seek to develop transdisciplinary courses for their students. This includes finding common ground and learning how to communicate and connect across disciplines.
- The transition from the (relatively immersive) workshop to the online group work (alongside other work) requires commitment.
- The course developers have to take into account the tension between trying to embed more active learning strategies in the courses and practicalities such as the amount of preparation and independent work inherent to active learning that students have to engage in.
- The heavy schedule of the courses and other elements of their study programmes may make it difficult for students to process all transdisciplinary learning materials, attend lectures and deliver assignments within the timeframe available for the courses. Course developers/teachers will need to facilitate and mitigate these challenges for students.
- Need to consider how the course schedules fit with other courses, holidays (which may differ across partner institutions), etc.
- Budgets/institutional commitments for staffing/logistic arrangements need to be considered in advance alongside course development.
- If course activities involve engagement of external stakeholders, it is important to brief them sufficiently on the scope of the course and their role/involvement.
- There needs to be an idea of what the other developed courses involve (e.g., contents but also practical arrangements).
- Involving local communities is a key component in the courses, but language may sometimes be a barrier (Thai/English). Therefore, we need to make sure Thai-speaking faculty are on board for translating.

- Continuous communication across course developers is necessary to avoid overlap in teaching and learning activities, providing a sufficient variety.