



# TRANSECTS

## NEWSLETTER

*TRANSECTS* is an innovative, transdisciplinary research training partnership that reconfigures sustainability science education, prepares graduates to be the next generation of sustainability change makers, and offers unparalleled opportunities for intercultural learning through shared international experiences and comparative analysis across the Global North and South.

To learn more about *TRANSECTS*, read our newsletter, [explore our website](https://sens.usask.ca/transects), or reach out to us directly.

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## PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

**Midterm Report: Where We Are and Where We're Headed** By Dr. Maureen G. Reed and Marlis Merry, University of Saskatchewan

In April, *TRANSECTS* submitted a Midterm Report to its main funder, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), documenting the program's activities and achievements up to its mid-point, as well as plans for the remainder of the initiative. An accompanying [infographic](#) was circulated, highlighting a few of the successes noted in the Midterm Report.

*TRANSECTS* has surpassed many of its proposed milestones and has built a robust international partnership for training the next generation of sustainability change-makers. SSHRC reviewers noted that *TRANSECTS* exceeded expectations in research and related activities, contributions by partners, and knowledge mobilization. They commended the program's governance, increasing engagement of students, and strong partner relationships to support learning labs.

The strength of the partnership rests on the engagement of participants. At this time, the Project Steering Committee (PSC) members thank everyone who has provided their time, expertise, energy, and support for the activities. *TRANSECTS* is a large team and the contributions of each individual and partnering organization are highly valued. It is rewarding to work together as a Community of Practice in common purpose of catalyzing change through diverse educational offerings for the next generation of sustainability change makers.

Following the submission of the Midterm Report, a workshop was held in July to review and finalize plans for the second half of *TRANSECTS*. Areas of focus included revisiting the Theory of Change, introducing continuing education courses and mentorship pathways, offering a scalable learning lab model in 2027, and discussing the program's legacy. *TRANSECTS* looks ahead to Phase 2, which will enhance existing offerings, bring new innovations to the program, and continue collaborations.



Image: Shortlisted badge for the Sustainability Education Literacy Award at the QS Reimagine Education Awards.

***TRANSECTS* Shortlisted for Sustainability Education Literacy Award** By Marlis Merry, University of Saskatchewan

*TRANSECTS* is thrilled to share that it has been shortlisted for the Sustainability Education Literacy Award at the QS Reimagine Education Awards. While the final results are yet to be announced, being shortlisted itself is a remarkable accomplishment, placing *TRANSECTS* in the top 20% of 1600 submissions across 18 award categories. Thank you to everyone who helped make this achievement possible. *TRANSECTS* is honoured to be recognized among such inspiring work.

**New *TRANSECTS* Publication Introduces Novel Approach to Transdisciplinary Sustainability Education** By Marlis Merry, University of Saskatchewan

*TRANSECTS* is pleased to announce its recent publication introducing the Transdisciplinary International Learning Lab (TILL) as a novel format for transdisciplinary sustainability education, titled "[Intercultural networks deepen learning for transformative sustainability education: lessons from co-designing transdisciplinary international learning labs](#)". The article highlights the value of international and intercultural collaboration in co-designing and delivering TILLs, and shares key insights gained through this process. It is featured in a special issue on Biosphere networks in *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability* (COSUST).

### Showcasing Recent Master's Projects By Marlis Merry, University of Saskatchewan

Two University of Saskatchewan Master's students, Liying Chen and Precious Samuel, have recently completed their final projects with *TRANSECTS* and partners. Liying Chen created an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) guide for *TRANSECTS*, which included components such as an EDI framework and toolkit. Precious Samuel worked alongside ECO Canada to create a mentorship toolkit for the School of Environment and Sustainability (SENS), offering support and recommendations for mentors and mentees. Appreciation is extended to the students for their exceptional work, and their reports are currently being reviewed for implementation.

### FonAfricaBR: Project Launch to Promote Young African Scientists and Sustainable Development in BRs By Jana Gengelbach, Eberswalde University for Sustainable Development

As part of a project funded by the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN) and in close cooperation with Rhodes University (South Africa), and University for Sustainable Development Eberswalde HNEE (Germany) a transnational research and support network is being established in the context of UNESCO Biosphere Reserves/Regions (BRs) in sub-Saharan Africa.

The project supports master's and PhD students as well as stakeholders from BRs in three African countries (South Africa, Ghana and a third country the project partners are in the process to identify collaboratively) in developing their research skills in the field of transdisciplinary, practice-oriented sustainability research. The focus is on UNESCO BRs, which play a central role in the conservation and sustainable use of ecosystem services in the context of climate change.

In addition to a needs analysis and the selection of suitable network partners, young scientists receive targeted support for their research work. They are accompanied by peer mentors and practitioners from the BRs. Workshops, exchange formats, and international conferences not only strengthen cooperation between science and practice, but also the networking of young researchers among themselves. The project shall promote innovative solutions for ecological and social challenges – and support a dynamic community of transdisciplinary practice.

- Project directors: Prof. Dr. Heike Molitor/Prof. Dr. Eureka Rosenberg
- Project management/coordination: Kwanele Siyengo, Franziska Rottig, Jana Gengelbach
- Period: July 2025-June 2027

For further information visit: [HNE Eberswalde: Early-Career African Research in Biosphere Reserves](#)



Image: Lake Bosomtwe BR, Ghana. Credit: Franziska Rottig.

## RECENT ACTIVITIES

**START Update** By Chloe Canning, University of Saskatchewan

It has been a busy few months on the Student and Trainee Advisory Roundtable (START)! In April, the Speaker Series was launched, an opportunity to learn from each other about various experiences and paths into transdisciplinary work. Three wonderful speakers kicked off the first round of the series. If you missed any of the speakers, you can find a recording of their talk on the [TRANSECTS hub](#) YouTube page! The second round of speakers began on September 24th. Please check your emails or contact <start@usask.ca> for more information.

As part of the *TRANSECTS* midterm planning workshop in July, START hosted a poster session where START members and TILL alumni shared the research and work they've been a part of! A diverse range of disciplinary and transdisciplinary work was showcased, highlighting the reach of the *TRANSECTS* program! Images of the posters were then shared with the *TRANSECTS* community, and everyone is invited to [view the student posters](#).

*TRANSECTS* wants to thank everyone who participated in the 2024-2025 START cohort for their time and dedication to START. The 2025-2026 START cohort will hold its first meeting in October, so stay tuned for more events and opportunities to connect with the *TRANSECTS* and START network!

**TILL 2025: UN-Endorsed Decade Activity in Garden Route BR** By Marlis Merry, University of Saskatchewan

*TRANSECTS* is pleased to share that TILL 2025 was endorsed by the United Nations (UN) Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development as a Decade Activity, reflecting its commitment to promoting ocean science for a healthier and more sustainable ocean and contributing to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14 (Life Below Water).

TILL 2025 has concluded following the online Foundational Course in April and the onsite Learning Lab in May and June, where trainees were hosted in South Africa's Garden Route BR to practice transdisciplinary research. With the guidance and support of mentors from the *TRANSECTS* network, a TILL alumni Peer Mentor, BR practitioners, and landscape partners, trainees from universities in Canada, Germany, and South Africa worked in small international project teams to address local issues aligned with the SDGs and the Garden Route BR's research and development needs surrounding Marine and Coastal Protected Areas.

A team of early-career researchers within *TRANSECTS* are currently undertaking an evaluation of the program in an effort to support mutual learning from the TILL and to guide continuous improvement of its design. The primary goal of the TILL 2025 evaluation is to determine how changes made to the TILL programming impacted the experience for trainees, while identifying which components of the design have the most significant impact on student learning and experiences. The findings will be shared as recommendations for future programs with specific suggestions for a more scalable TILL model.



**2021** United Nations Decade  
**2030** of Ocean Science  
for Sustainable Development

TILL 2025 is endorsed by the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development as a Decade Activity. Use of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development logo by a non-UN entity does not imply the endorsement of the United Nations of such entity, its products or services, or of its planned activities. For more information please access: <https://forum.oceandecade.org/page/disclaimer>



Image: TILL 2025 trainees, mentors, and practitioners.  
Credit: Garden Route BR.

### Peer Mentor's Reflection on the 2025 TILL By Enya Munting, Rhodes University

This TILL was a profound experience for everyone who participated. I am so grateful for the experience and for all the incredible people who were part of it.

For the first two weeks, we learned from university lecturers, legal professionals, BR practitioners and the Garden Route BR landscape partners at SANparks, Cape Nature, and Nature's Valley Trust (NVT). By the end of orientation, TILL Trainees ("TILLies") were discussing local social-ecological systems and how they could be improved, and were ready to dive into their projects, which focused loosely on improving conservation practice in coastal portions of the Garden Route BR.

Nature's Valley became our home for five weeks, and in that time, we became some kind of family. At our doorstep, we had an estuary, Afromontane Forest, Fynbos, and the Atlantic Ocean, and we made the most of the adventures they contained. Field trips every Wednesday provided an opportunity to bond while learning about local contexts. A mini retreat taught us how to show up for ourselves and each other.

We had many "braais" (South African barbecues), where our local TILLies pulled out all the stops for our international friends. I loved our pool tournament and the visits to the farmer's markets, although for the TILLies who went, the nearby Garden Route Nature Reserve was probably the highlight: they saw zebra, lion, elephants, springbok, and plenty more African game!

The TILLies worked incredibly hard and navigated Transdisciplinary research like champions. With good mentors and determination, they delivered impressive research, and their final presentations reiterated to me the importance of collaboration for building a sustainable future.

TILL 2025 did not disappoint. For me, it was fascinating and deeply educational to glimpse TILL from the perspective of the organisers: designing and implementing such a programme is hard work, and I am grateful for those who contribute to creating these deep learning experiences, year after year.



Images: BRI Supervisory Board meeting, HNEE, Eberswalde, Germany. Credit: Ulrich Wessollek.

## Strategic Milestone for the BRI: Supervisory Board Meets for the First Time in Eberswalde

By Jana Gengelbach, Eberswalde University for Sustainable Development

With the constituent meeting of its Supervisory Board on June 19, 2025, the Biosphere Reserves Institute (BRI) at HNEE has reached another important milestone. As the world's first UNESCO Category 2 institute focusing on BRs, the BRI is thus strengthening its role as an internationally networked think tank for research, education, and sustainable development.

The prominent Supervisory Board, which includes representatives from politics, science, and international institutions, will help shape the strategic direction of the BRI in the future. During an excursion to the Schorfheide-Chorin BR, the members were also able to gain an impression of regional practices. Dr. Stefanie Hedtkamp was elected chairwomen at the constituent meeting, and Dr. Suk-Kyung Shim was appointed as deputy chairperson. Both are internationally renowned experts in the field of BRs and UNESCO programmes.

The Supervisory board of the BRI comprises the contractual partners of UNESCO, the federal Republic of Germany and HNEE, and additionally includes privileged partners of the BRI and country representatives from Costa Rica, Ghana, Canada and the Republic of Korea. Besides the BRI *TRANSECTS* members Prof. Dr. Maureen G. Reed holds the role of the Canadian country representative and Dr. Lutz Möller, the deputy Secretary General represents the German Commission for UNESCO.

For further information visit: [HNE Eberswalde: UNESCO Institute for Biosphere Reserves](https://www.hnee-eberswalde.de/en/unesco-institute-for-biosphere-reserves)



Image: Spencer project meeting with Mistawasis Nêhiyawak. Credit: Mzukisi Kuse.

## Spencer Foundation Project Update

By Dr. Mzukisi Kuse, Rhodes University

The Spencer project is aimed towards redressing inequalities in sustainability education. Our projects emphasize youth engagement because youth both experience severe inequality of opportunities and offer a means to catalyze transformation. The Spencer project has three case studies, one in Canada and two in South Africa. In Canada, the Redberry Lake BR and Mistawasis Nêhiyawak are partnering to develop land-based education science curricula for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in public schools. In South Africa, the Kruger to Canyons BR has engaged with Indigenous and rural youth from villages to become land-based custodians that address climate change through nature-based solutions. In the Vhembe BR, recent graduates from the University of Venda (classified in South Africa as an historically disadvantaged university) lead projects with resource-poor communities that strengthen local knowledge of sustainability and secure sustainable livelihood options in the biocultural economy. In South Africa, a meeting and a learning circle was held at the Wits Rural Facility, from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> of March 2025. On the 21<sup>st</sup> of July 2025, there was a meeting between some South African representatives of the Spencer project and the Canadian Spencer project team at the Redberry Lake BR.

## COMING UP

**TRANSECTS Announces Its First Continuing Education Module** By Dr. Garrett Richards, Memorial University of Newfoundland

The *TRANSECTS* continuing education team has been focused on revising and implementing the draft continuing education framework. While it is too early to say what exactly the ultimate set of virtual continuing education modules will look like, the team is experimenting with the delivery of a module through one possible platform this fall. After facilitating some workshops exploring transdisciplinarity training at USask in January, members of the continuing education team learned of a virtual platform used in Health Sciences at USask: IPECT (Interprofessional Education Competency Tracker). This platform allows for free-of-charge participation in interactive virtual modules that require negligible attention from instructors during each module offering, which are intended to be completed by learners in 10 hours or less. A design process involving a small group of experts builds the module over three iterative meetings, actively facilitated and supported by IPECT staff, who generously offered to pilot the process for a *TRANSECTS* module at no charge. These parameters were a good match for the intended continuing education offerings from *TRANSECTS*. So, the continuing education team selected the topic of "building and nurturing partnerships" from the framework, recruiting a group of *TRANSECTS* members and other experts to work through the design process over June, July, and August. This module is now drafted and ready for its pilot launch in October. Sub-topics include readiness, pre-meetings, collective thinking, assumptions, responsiveness, reflection, and follow-ups, to name a few. More information (e.g. how to register) to be released as it becomes available!

**New Video Series: Day in the Life of BR Practitioners** By Marlis Merry, University of Saskatchewan

We invite BR practitioners to participate in the new *TRANSECTS* video series, "Day in the Life of BR Practitioners". *TRANSECTS* wants to showcase what daily life looks like for practitioners working in BRs across the globe, connected through the *TRANSECTS* network. Practitioners from any BR are welcome to be featured. Videos of all styles and formats are welcome, and videos can be edited on your behalf. The videos will be shared on the *TRANSECTS* YouTube channel and social media pages, with the option to co-author posts, tag your BR pages, and/or link to your BR website. Please email [transects@usask.ca](mailto:transects@usask.ca) if you are interested!

**Launching New Online Spaces For Sharing and Learning** By Marlis Merry, University of Saskatchewan

*TRANSECTS* is introducing new online spaces for sharing, learning, and amplifying the voices of our partners. The program has joined the Bluesky social media platform, an online space with a growing presence of postsecondary institutions, students, and researchers. While *TRANSECTS* remains on Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, and YouTube, Bluesky will be another platform for engagement with the *TRANSECTS* community and the public. Everyone is also invited to explore moments captured during training, mentoring, and knowledge mobilization activities on the website's new Visual Stories page.

*TRANSECTS* is also excited to announce the upcoming launch of the *TRANSECTS* Resource Platform (TARP), a dedicated space for sharing resources from across the *TRANSECTS* network. Stay tuned for the link to TARP, where you will find blog posts, articles, handbooks, toolkits, videos, and more. We will also be inviting partners to share! If you are interested, please contact [transects@usask.ca](mailto:transects@usask.ca).

# PROFILES

*TRANSECTS* is a socially and culturally diverse network that includes researchers and emerging scholars, local and Indigenous leaders, experts in sustainability practice, practitioners, and partner organizations. *TRANSECTS* has hubs in Germany, South Africa, and Canada, with six partner universities across these countries, including the University of Saskatchewan, Vancouver Island University, Eberswalde University of Sustainable Development, Rhodes University, the University of the Witwatersrand, and the University of Venda. *TRANSECTS* also has wonderful partners and collaborators in Argentina, Ghana, Ukraine, the United States, and Zimbabwe. Each newsletter will showcase a small sample of the *TRANSECTS* network.

## LIVE, WORK, OR PLAY IN OTTAWA?

Master of Community Planning student at VIU studying how **park design affects community well-being and sustainability**.

If you're 18+ and use parks in Ottawa, share your thoughts to help shape greener, healthier spaces for everyone!



Scan the QR code  
to take the 5  
minute survey!!

or go to this link: <https://bit.ly/ottawaparksforpeopleandplanet>

This study has been cleared by the Vancouver Island University (VIU) Research Ethics Board (REB #00000000) who can be reached at [ethics@viu.ca](mailto:ethics@viu.ca). For additional information, questions or concerns, please contact Holly Faithfull (Master's Student) at [holly.f@viu.ca](mailto:holly.f@viu.ca) or their supervisor Sarah Desautels at [sarah.desautels@viu.ca](mailto:sarah.desautels@viu.ca)



Image: 'Live, Work, Or Play  
In Ottawa?' poster.

Credit: Holly Faithfull.

## Designing Urban Parks for Community Well-Being and Sustainability in Ottawa

By Holly Faithfull, Master's Student, Community Planning,  
Vancouver Island University

As part of my Master of Community Planning research at Vancouver Island University, I am exploring how urban park design processes in Ottawa shape community well-being and sustainability. Parks are more than just green spaces - they are essential sites for health, connection, and ecological resilience. My project involves both community surveys and interviews with professionals in planning, design, and policy to understand how park users experience these spaces and how decisions about design and management are made. A key focus is the social-ecological role of parks: how design supports biodiversity, sustainability, and inclusive access, while fostering stronger communities. If you live, work, or play in Ottawa and are 18+, I'd love to hear your perspective! Please consider completing the short survey here: [bit.ly/ottawaparksforpeopleandplanet](https://bit.ly/ottawaparksforpeopleandplanet). The results will inform more equitable, healthy, and sustainable approaches to park planning in Ottawa, with broader implications for urban green space design across Canadian cities.

## Disposal of Intermediate Level Waste from Small Modular Nuclear Reactors in Saskatchewan

By S. Hakan Armağan, Ph.D.  
Student, College of Engineering, University of Saskatchewan

There is a renewed global interest in nuclear energy. In Canada, the Government of Saskatchewan is investigating the possible deployment of small modular nuclear reactors (SMNRs) to replace coal-fired plants. Like all nuclear reactors, SMNRs will generate low, intermediate and high-level waste that needs to be properly managed and disposed of according to its type. The Canadian Nuclear Waste Management Organisation requires that intermediate-level waste be disposed in a deep geologic repository – a multi-layered system that includes specially designed canisters with several engineered barriers to contain nuclear waste, buried deep in a suitable geologic formation to minimize harms to the humans and to the environment. The purpose of my Ph.D. research is to assess the suitability of clay rich formations in Saskatchewan to potentially host a geological repository for intermediate-level waste. The results will advance scholarly understanding of many of the research outcomes that could be readily adaptable to scenarios in Canada and abroad.

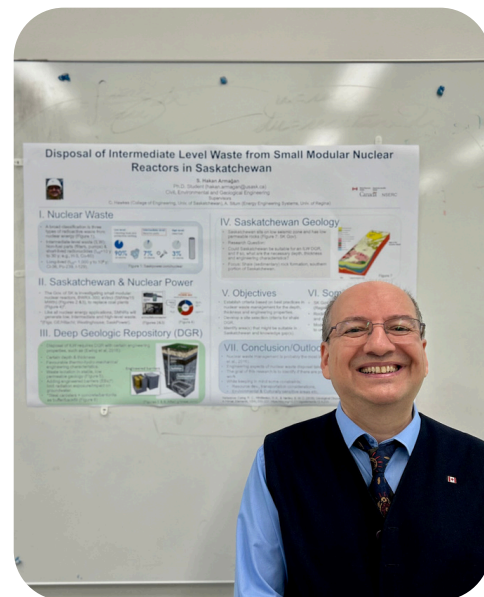


Image: S. Hakan Armağan with his  
poster at the *TRANSECTS* Student  
Symposium on July 17, 2025.

Credit: Marlis Merry.