

As the year comes to an end, *TRANSECTS* extends heartfelt appreciation for the support and collaboration of everyone within this community of practice. Looking ahead to the coming year, we are excited about the opportunities and adventures it will bring. Wishing everyone a joyful holiday season and a promising New Year!

### PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

#### Spencer Foundation Application

*TRANSECTS* members have recently applied for the Spencer Foundation's Research-Practice Partnerships grant. The collaborative effort involved partners from academic institutions and Biosphere Reserves/Regions (BRs) in Canada and South Africa, including representatives from the University of Saskatchewan (USask), Redberry Lake BR, Mistawasis Nêhiyawak, the University of Venda (Univen), the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), Rhodes University (RU), Kruger to Canyons BR, and Vhembe BR. The application was focused on conducting three qualitative and participatory case studies on education within BRs in Canada and South Africa. The case studies include:

- Train the trainer in land-based or experiential education (Canada)
- Applying local and Indigenous knowledge systems to adaptation (South Africa)
- Learning together to participate in the Biocultural Economy (South Africa)



Image: Spencer Foundation Research-Practice Partnerships Grant writing guide.

After each case study, participants will engage in structured reflection activities or learning circles to generate evidence of learning and social change. Notification of the application's success is expected by mid-2024.

#### Release of *TRANSECTS* Handbook for Educators, Practitioners, and Trainees

In August 2023, *TRANSECTS* program handbooks were released for key audiences within the community of practice, including trainees, educators, and practitioners. These handbooks serve as central documents for program information, policies and procedures, and roles and expectations. All *TRANSECTS* members, partners, and interested audiences are welcome to email [transects@usask.ca](mailto:transects@usask.ca) to view the handbooks.

Image: *TRANSECTS* Handbook cover page.



Image: Dr. Karsten Liber, SENS Executive Director, and Chief Daryl Watson, Mistawasis Nêhiyawak, signing the ASOTA during the renewal ceremony (L-R). Photo credit: Marlis Merry.

#### Dr. Duduzile Ngwenya's *TRANSECTS* Research

Dr. Ngwenya, a Post-Doctoral Fellow at RU (South Africa) working with *TRANSECTS*, expresses gratitude to all who contributed to her successful research trip to Canada and Germany in October. Special thanks to *TRANSECTS* members, Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region Research Institute (MABRRI) members, Prof. Joern Fischer, Deepika Joon, research participants, and ELRC administrators. Her research, titled "*TRANSECTS*: Evaluation of Support for Transdisciplinary Research in Higher Education," explores how universities and institutions facilitate transdisciplinary (transD) research, teaching, and learning. Dr. Ngwenya conducted interviews and focus groups across multiple institutions and participated in various activities, including attending the School of Environment and Sustainability (SENS) and Mistawasis Nêhiyawak ASOTA renewal ceremony and presenting at the *TRANSECTS* Program Institute in Germany. Her research findings will guide efforts to enhance transD research and develop indicators for evaluating programs like *TRANSECTS*.



Image: Dr. Duduzile Ngwenya, RU, with SENS students while visiting USask. Photo credit: Marlis Merry.

**The BRI Receives UNESCO Category II Status**

The Biosphere Reserves Institute (BRI) at Eberswalde University for Sustainable Development (HNEE) received United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Category II status in November during the 42nd General Conference in Paris. Approved unanimously for eight years, the designation includes the establishment of an international governing board to shape and enhance integration into the international research landscape. Founded in 2019, BRI scientists explore the significance and impact of BRs while providing training and networking opportunities for the international BR community. The BRI offers a BR-focused master’s program in English and a doctoral program in collaboration with Leuphana University of Lüneburg. The BRI aims to support the development of BRs as model regions for sustainability under the "Man and the Biosphere" program.



Image: Dr. James Robson, USask, with SENS students at the Program Institute in Canada. Photo credit: Marlis Merry.

**TRANSECTS Program Institute in Germany - October 2023**

The HNEE-based TRANSECTS team hosted an international Program Institute from October 25<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup>, bringing together 57 TRANSECTS partners from various academic institutions, practitioners, and shared responsibility holders from Canada, South Africa, and Germany, as well as graduate students and TILL alumni. Framed by visits to Schorfheide-Chorin BR and Spreewald BR, the Program Institute concentrated on three main goals to explore different experiences and understandings of transD research:

1. To deepen collective understandings of transD research in science, education, and practice from different perspectives. Reflect on the application and teaching of transD research and specific transD methods.
2. Lessons from past TILLS and core aspects of future TILLS.
3. Learning about the visions of BRs and exploring how education and research may contribute to moving towards these visions.

Featuring “storytellers” from Germany, South Africa, and Canada, practitioners presented case studies from their transD journeys in BRs. After the presentations, participants engaged in focused discussions, utilizing "listening lenses" to concentrate on key aspects of the transdisciplinary experiences. During the Program Institute, Konstantin Behr, a visual note taker, consolidated individual visions into a comprehensive drawing to facilitate understanding of the collective conversation. A report will be released detailing the events and findings from the Program Institute further.



Image: HNEE president, Matthias Barth, with Kerstin Pürschel, Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of Germany to UNESCO, during the 42nd Session of the UNESCO General Conference (L-R). Photo credit: Lutz Möller.

**RECENT ACTIVITIES**

**TRANSECTS Program Institute in Canada - September 2023**

The TRANSECTS Program Institute in Canada took place from September 10th to 13th, bringing together 17 TRANSECTS members and Transdisciplinary International Learning Lab (TILL) alumni at the Biogeoscience Institute: Barrier Lake Field Station in Kananaskis, Alberta. The Institute focused on three key goals:

1. Deepening collective understanding of transdisciplinary (transD) research and practice.
2. Strengthening relationships within TRANSECTS and commitment to its work.
3. Developing a deeper appreciation for the challenges faced by Biosphere Regions (BRs) in Canada.

Hosted by the USask-based TRANSECTS team, the event saw active participation from attendees who both planned and facilitated discussions and activities. This interactive format facilitated engagement, learning, and knowledge exchange. We express gratitude to everyone who attended and contributed to the success of the Program Institute. We welcome you to [view the report](#) for additional details.

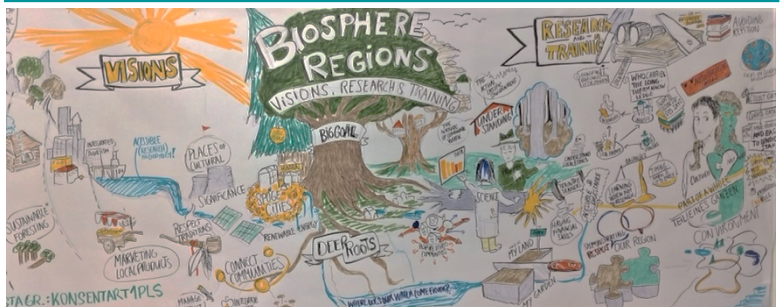


Image: A visualization of the collective conversations at the Program Institute in Germany. Graphic by visual notetaker, Konstantin Behr. Photo credit: Yen Lin.



Image: TRANSECTS members and SENS students at the Program Institute in Canada. Photo credit: Marlis Merry.



Image: Program Institute attendees in Germany, including practitioners, shared responsibility holders, and representatives from academic institutions from Canada, South Africa, and Germany.

## COMING UP

### Upcoming TILL and Program Institute in 2024

The upcoming 2024 TILL will be hosted by partners at Vancouver Island University and the Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region (MABR) between April and June of 2024. Following the TILL, there will be an international Program Institute for TRANSECTS members and TILL alumni to gather and exchange in person. After undertaking a competitive admissions process in Canada, Germany, and South Africa, students from USask, HNEE, RU, and Wits were selected to take part in this onsite research training opportunity. They will be guided by an international team of faculty and peer mentors. The research topic involves invasive species and the Sustainable Development Goals, decided through consultations with the MABR Roundtable. We welcome the incoming TILL students to the TRANSECTS network, and we encourage you to view the profiles of the mentor team below.

### START and the Buddy Program

The Student and Trainee Advisory Round Table (START) has recently launched as a student- and trainee-led group that advises and supports TRANSECTS on engaging students and trainees in transD learning and TRANSECTS activities. Specifically, the START advisory team will communicate to TRANSECTS:

1. What students and trainees need to be successful members of TRANSECTS and as transD researchers, and
2. How to engage and support students in TRANSECTS activities and transD learning.

Pilot TILL and 2023 TILL alumni are serving as the first START advisors for a one-year term, with Danielle Spence (USask) as the coordinator. Students and trainees interested in transD or sustainability are welcome to serve as an advisor on this roundtable. They are also beginning to seek TILL alumni to be part of the Buddy Program, designed as a peer support-based opportunity to connect TILL alumni with the new TILL learners prior to, and during, the 2024 TILL. Buddies will provide advice and guidance on the TILL experience from the point of view of TILL alumni, sharing their experiences and offering support to new TILL learners. Buddies will help learners understand what to expect from the TILL, support them with finding their place in the TILL, and provide external support prior to and during the TILL. The Buddy Program is designed to provide support and boost confidence for incoming TILL learners as they embark on their TILL journey. It aims to maintain existing connections and foster the growth of new ones within the TRANSECTS network.

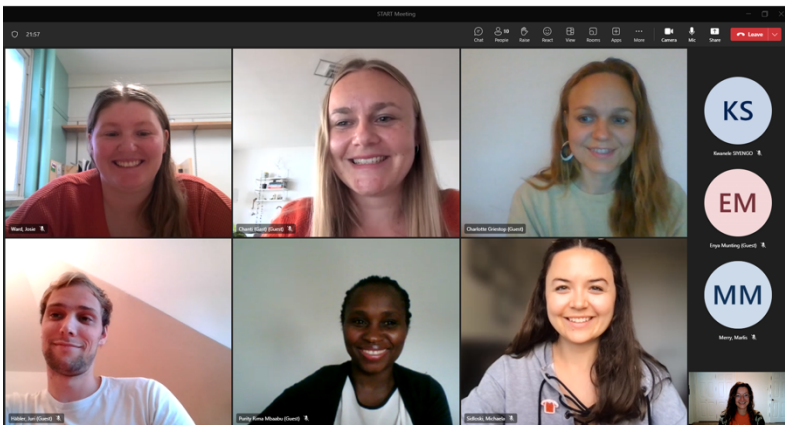


Image: The first virtual gathering of the START advisors in August. Photo credit: Danielle Spence.

# MEMBER PROFILES

We are a socially and culturally diverse team 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 five partner universities across these countries, including the University of Saskatchewan, Vancouver Island University, Eberswalde University of Sustainable Development, Rhodes University, and the University of the Witwatersrand. We also have wonderful partners and collaborators in Argentina, Ghana, Ukraine, and Zimbabwe. Each newsletter, we intend to profile a small sample. Please read about the great team members below.



Dr. Pam Shaw (Lead Mentor) is the Director of the Master of Community Planning Program at Vancouver Island University and the Research Director of the Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region Research Institute. Dr. Shaw was involved as a faculty mentor at the pilot TILL and 2023 TILL, and she recently attended the *TRANSECTS* Program Institutes held in both Canada and Germany.



Dr. Felicitas Egunyu (Faculty Mentor) is an Assistant Professor at the School of Environment, Resources and Sustainability at the University of Waterloo. Dr. Egunyu is a member of *TRANSECTS* involved in the Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Team (MELT).



Dr. Heike Molitor (Faculty Mentor) is a member of the Faculty Landscape Management and Nature Conservation at Eberswalde University of Sustainable Development and a member of the German National Committee of the MAB Programme. She specialises in environmental education and education for sustainable development.



Dr. James Robson (Faculty Mentor) is an Associate Professor in Human Dimensions of Sustainability and Assistant Director Academic (External) in the School of Environment and Sustainability at the University of Saskatchewan. Dr. Robson is a UNESCO Co-Chair in Biocultural Diversity, Sustainability, Reconciliation, and Renewal, as well as Canadian Co-Director for *TRANSECTS*.



Dr. Bianca Currie (Faculty Mentor) is a Research Associate at the Sustainability Research Unit at the Nelson Mandela University and the Chief Executive of the Garden Route Biosphere Reserve in South Africa. Dr. Currie was involved in the *TRANSECTS* pilot TILL as a faculty mentor.



Kwanele Siyengo (Peer Mentor) is a master's student at Rhodes University in South Africa. Kwanele participated as a student learner in the *TRANSECTS* pilot TILL and is an advisor on the Student and Trainee Advisory Round Table (START).