



Look who's asking
Reflections on participatory
research approaches

S07: Co-production of knowledge, participatory approaches and engagement with stakeholders

hew McPherson



MSEAS 2024
June 3 – 7, 2024
Yokohama, Japan



2021 United Nations Decade
of Ocean Science
for Sustainable Development
A UN Ocean Decade Event
#MSEAS2024

Marine Socio-Ecological Systems Symposium



IMBeR
HUMAN DIMENSIONS



Samiya Selim
Priscila M. Lopes
Grant Murray
Prateep Nayak
Ron Vave
Ingrid van Putten*
Yinji Li*
Henrik Österblom*
Paul Onyango[†]



IMBeR is a **Large-Scale Ocean Research Project** under SCOR and a **Global Research Project** under Future Earth

<https://imber.info/science/regional-programmes-working-groups/human-dimensions-working-group-hdwg/>

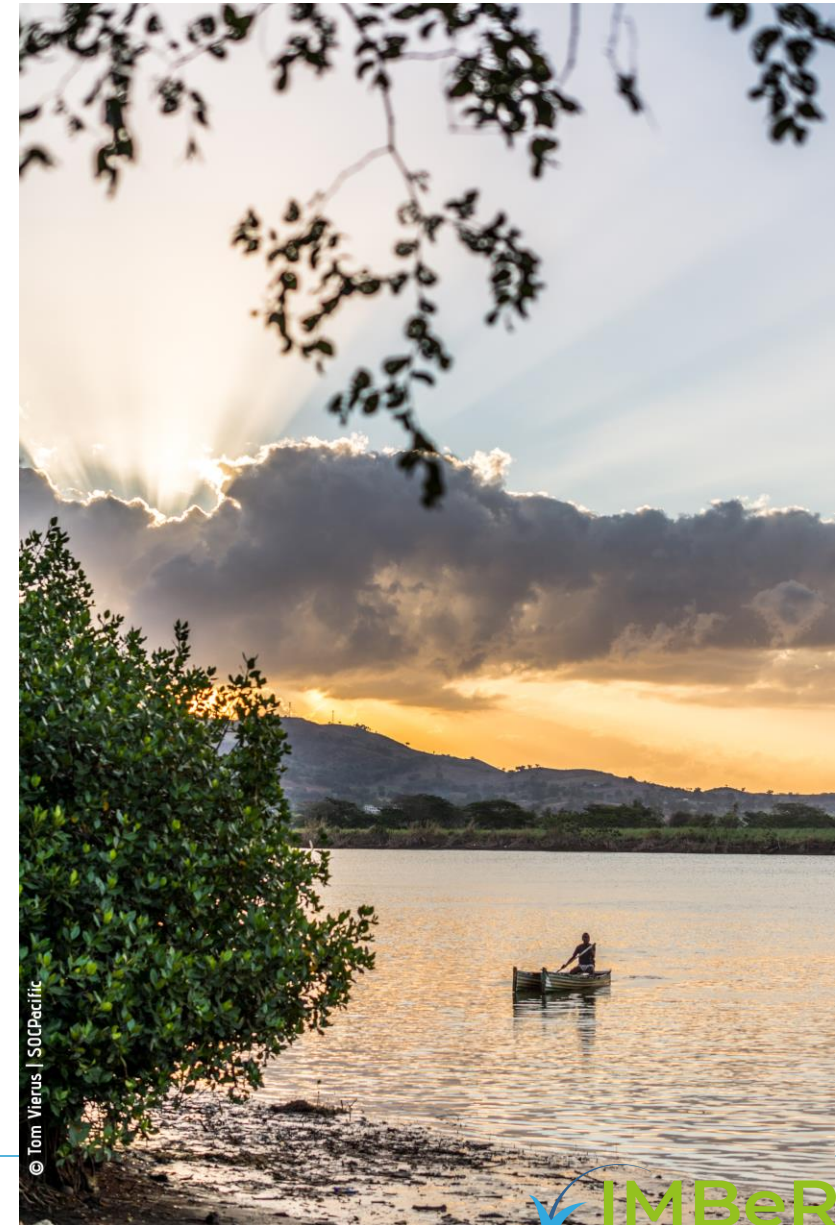
Background – science for the benefit of society?

- After decades of efforts to foster participatory research, and many advancements in transdisciplinary research design, this **question is still relevant**.
- Research **questions still seem to be framed and formulated outside the actual geographical, social, cultural and ecological setting** in which the research projects are supposed to be anchored.
- Even though research pathways have become more diverse, the **direction of the information flow still seems predominantly one way**.
- The **slow progress in transforming academic and funding environments** for true 'level-playing-field' research projects does not help this mono-directional research tendency.

Mausser et al. (2013) Transdisciplinary global change research: the co-creation of knowledge for sustainability. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability* 5(3): 420-431. ('Future Earth paper')

Research collaborations involving international 'north-south/east-west' teams requires self-reflection:

- Who is asking the research questions?
- What are the local questions?
- Who is framing these questions?
- Whose knowledge?
- Whose benefits?
- Whose lens(es)?
- Whose preconceived ideas? (D.Armitage)



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Survey (Email, June - October 2019)

18 directly contacted colleagues

- Information from ongoing or past research projects focusing on marine protected or managed areas, or small-scale fisheries
- Australia (Ingrid van Putten), Bangladesh (Samiya Selim), Brazil (Priscila Lopes), Fiji (Alifereti Tawake, Hugh Govan, Joeli Veitayaki), India (Prateep Nayak), Tanzania (Paul Onyango)...

Questionnaire with 22 questions in 3 sections on

- Approaches and requests by the community stakeholders to investigate certain aspects
- Options and rationale to accommodate these (or not)
- Funding options
- Consequences (what did it mean to integrate these investigations?) for the research and the rapport to the communities, application of results, on the overall relevance of the project
- Researchers' and stakeholders' perceptions and experiences

Some (also positive) results...



- All but 1 respondents have been approached by community members asking the researcher and the research team to investigate specific issues.
- Researchers were asked more often than they were able to accommodate the request.
- Mostly, local questions were interesting and aligned with original research interests.
- More often than not projects were designed based on local people's previous demands.
- In most cases, this led to increased project relevance and increased application of project results and outcome.
- People were more or as much interested than if they would not have been consulted.
- It was a question of accountability to people, e.g. in terms of LEK.
- Most often, time was a main consideration (as challenge & also benefit if long term relationships existed).
- Early consultation and involvement played a role. How are the communities approached? Rapport and trust building are extremely important.
- Respective funding frames and funding conditions were second after this.

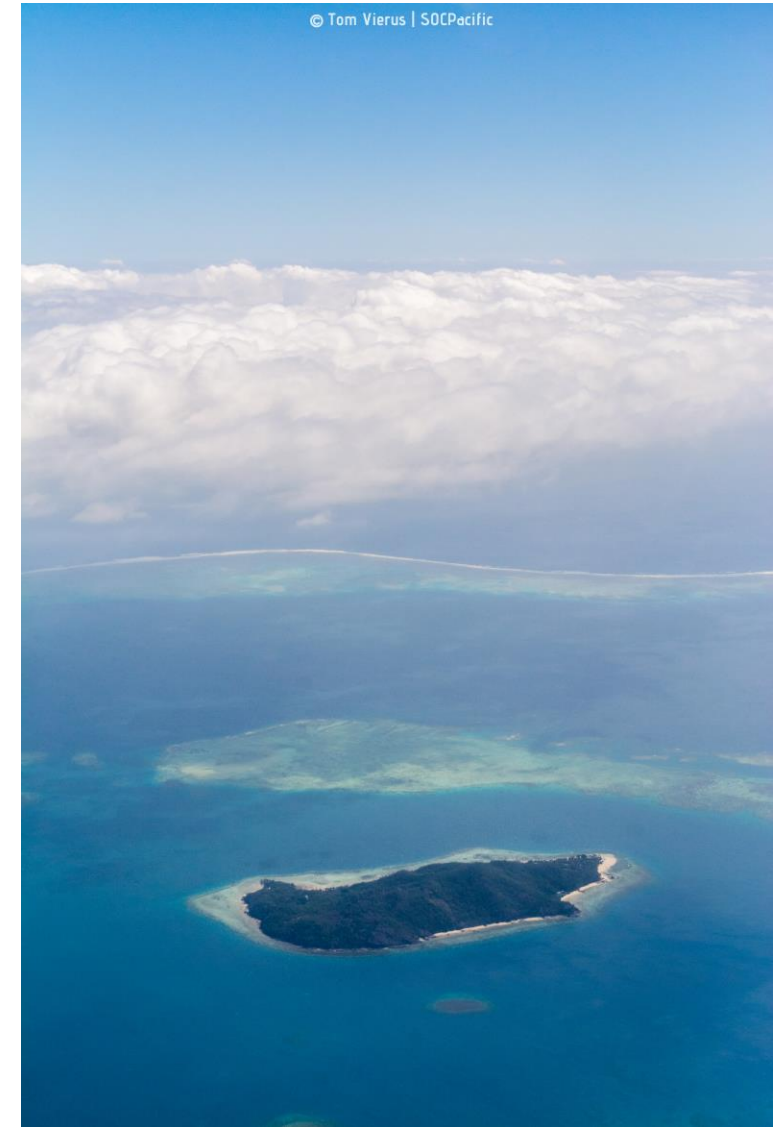
The Locally Managed Marine Area (LMMA) Network (Fiji)

“...every time I go to the field I use feedback and information from communities in one way or another to validate or update my work.

*In terms of a major example in using this practically our partnership with SPC has been an interesting 2 way flow but the major instance may be the use of members of the network first to **define priority natural resources** for which communities in different countries want information, helping **define what and how the information should be presented**, helping **review the information**, and ultimately participating in **ensuring widespread dissemination.**”*

Report available:

<https://coastfish.spc.int/component/content/article/44/393-guide-and-information-sheets-for-fishing-communities.html?lang=en>



Chilika Fisher Federation, Chilika Lagoon, India

- Following a PhD survey focusing on 2 villages in the area, other villages felt 'left behind', consequently a larger survey was designed, covering all of the 150 fisher villages in the region, with overwhelming response to this general survey.
- With further collaboration with fishers of Chilika, a state level policy workshop was planned to present the findings and bringing a wider media coverage to the many complex issues the survey had brought to light.

“This experience remained with me as a powerful image of transdisciplinary research that transcends artificial boundaries set by orthodox science.”

“In participatory action research not accepting people’s request is not an option. They are co-participants and have a right to direct the research as partners.”

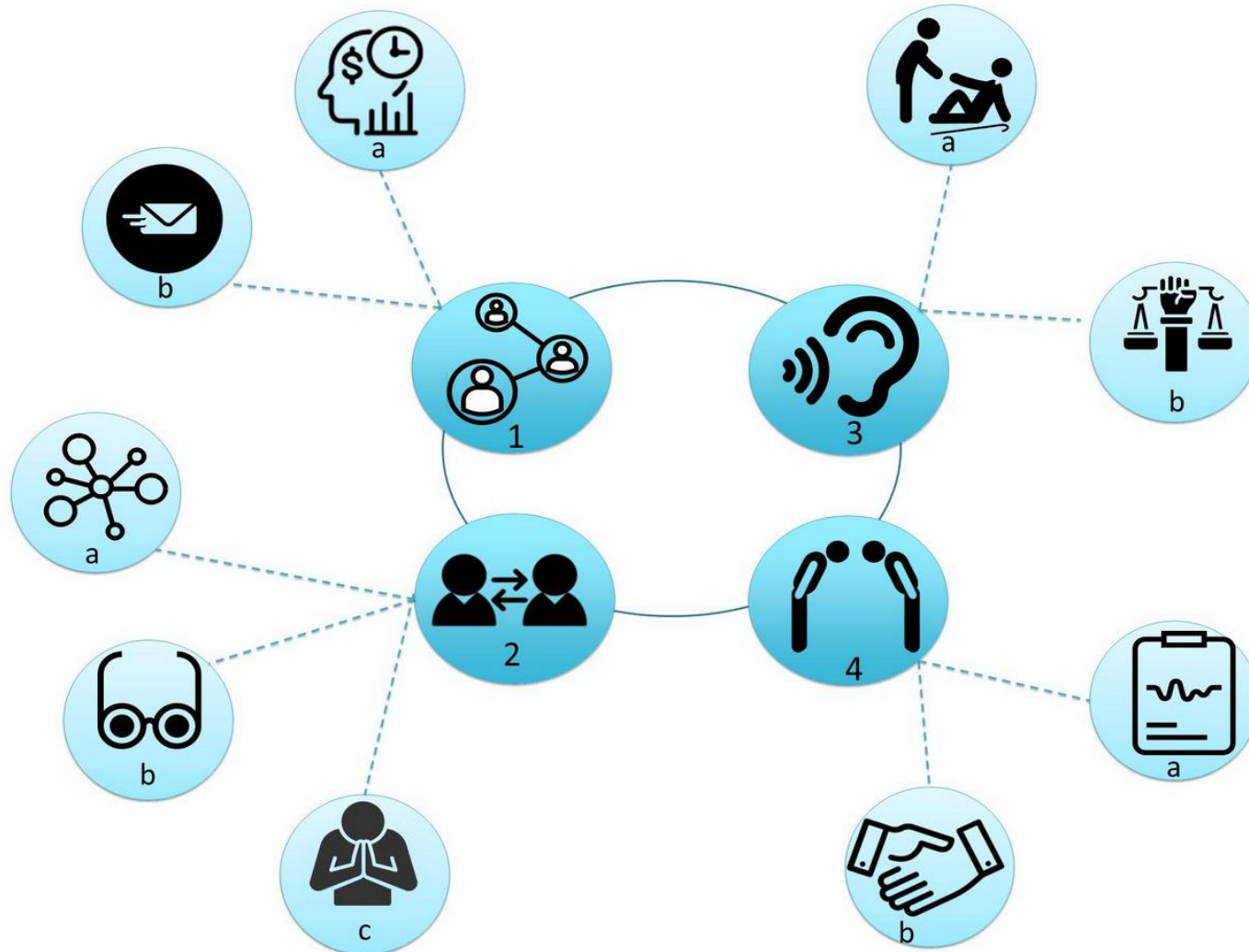
The **main findings** of the survey can be summarized under three main themes:

- (1) the need for participation beyond data collection,
- (2) acknowledgment and mitigation of an agenda mismatch between funded and needed research, &
- (3) emphasizing the power of the transdisciplinary processes of learning together.

“Specific funding to reach both scientific and societies’ demands and more integrative work among actors involved in these matters are essential features. In developing countries, where you are usually trying to survive as a researcher or an extensionist, and where effective organizational networks are usually missing, this is a very hard and usually unsustainable activity.”



!Frontlines: time, funding, engagement!

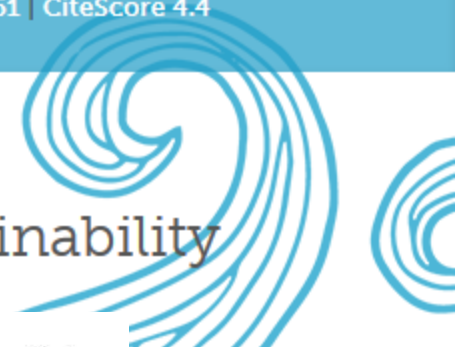


Insight 1: Invest in rapport by planning to (a) dedicate enough time to communities and (b) keeping in touch with them.

Insight 2: Engage and exchange: (a) invest in networking, (b) be open to new points of view and sources of knowledge, (c) be humble.

Insight 3: Be accommodating and attentive to communities' aspirations by (a) leaving no one behind and (b) avoiding creating mechanisms that promote power grabbing or imbalance.

Insight 4: Be respectful by (a) not treating communities as a simple means to test scientific hypotheses and (b) by promising them only what can be reasonably delivered.



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Solving Complex Ocean Challenges Through Interdisciplinary Research: Advances from Early
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PERSPECTIVE article

Front. Mar. Sci., 10 June 2021 | <https://doi.org/10.3389/fmars.2021.627502>



Look Who's Asking—Reflections on Participatory and Transdisciplinary Marine Research Approaches

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TRANSdisciplinary Research for Ocean Sustainability

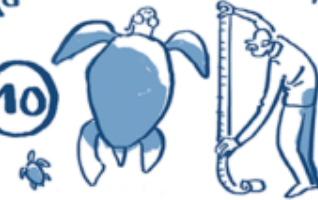
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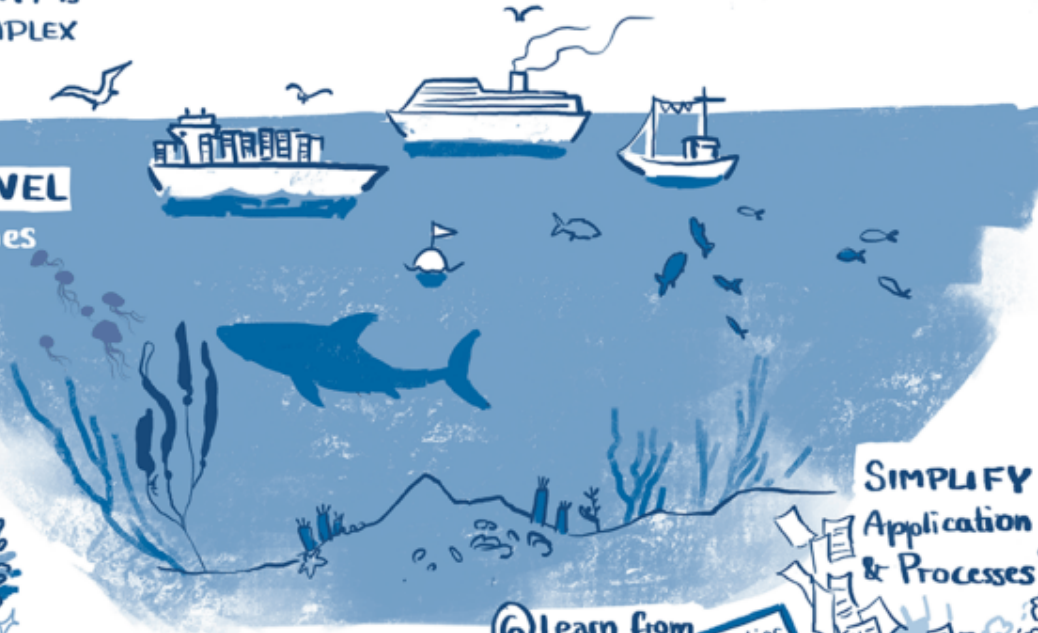
TRANSdisciplINARITY is
needed to address COMPLEX
GLOBAL problems

short & long-term
MONITORING & EVALUATION

10



2 Perspective change &
MULTI-LEVEL
approaches



9



3 Holistic
Under-
standing
TRANSdisciplINARITY



SIMPLIFY
Application
& Processes



of transdisciplinary work

4



5



PLATFORMS & mechanisms
for exchange & COLEARNING

6 Learn from
Case studies



TRANSFERABILITY &
GENERALISATION

7



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TRANSdisciplinary Research for Ocean Sustainability

use all tools
at your disposal!

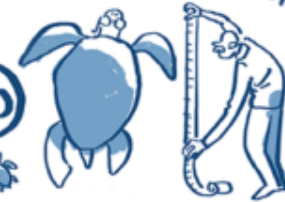


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2 Perspective change &
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9

Fair &
equitable

PARTNERSHIPS



3

Holistic
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TRANSdisciplINARITY

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PROFESSIONAL
RECOGNITION

of transdisciplinary work



4

Co-Design
Phase



5

PLATFORMS & mechanisms
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7

Funding



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS & THANKS

To all researchers who have provided critical information acquired through their experiences. Special thanks to all communities, NGOs and grassroots organizations who have helped transdisciplinary researchers gather and discuss pivotal information to build better and more inclusive models of coastal conservation.

Questions? Contributions?



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'Co-design for the Ocean
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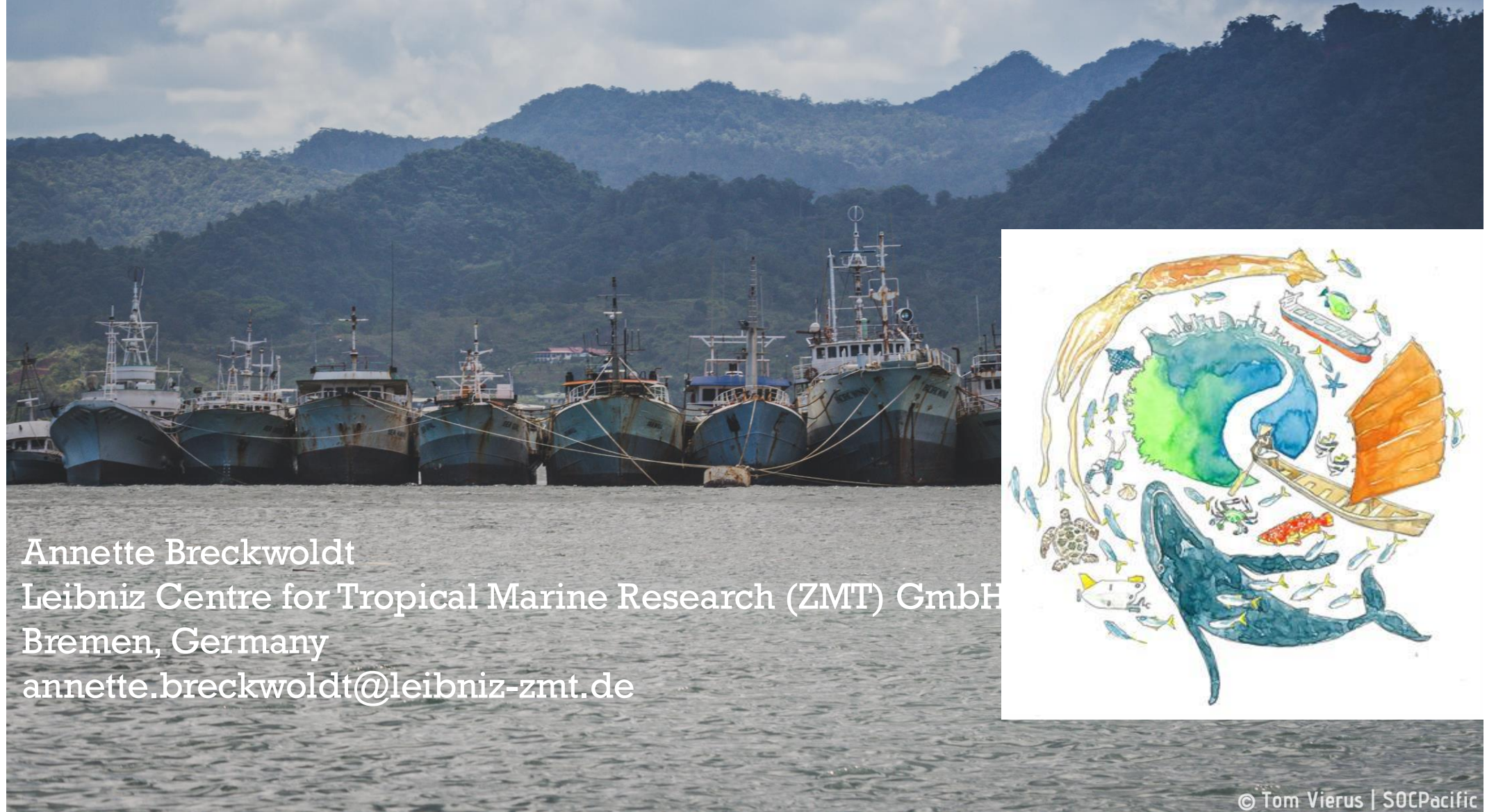
<https://oceandecade.org/news/ocean-decade-launches-new-online-course-on-co-design/>

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