Syntagma — A Model of Free, Transdisciplinary Research

How findings are brought into ordered relation without vanishing behind barriers

Thomas Schüller · Syntagma Forschung Wien
ORCID 0009-0003-9799-6747 · forschung@tschueller.com · Vienna / Tulln, Austria

ABSTRACT

Research is enclosed in many ways — behind paywalls, in disciplinary silos, bound to proprietary infrastructure. Syntagma proposes a counter-model: transdisciplinary work that sets findings and viewpoints from separate fields into ordered relation, keeps all results open source and public, and builds its community on its own, portable means. This paper describes the principle, openness as method, the sovereign and arms-free stance, and the organisational path from private stewardship to an independent institute.

1 SITUATION: RESEARCH UNDER ENCLOSURE

Knowledge is produced openly but frequently exploited in closed form. Publications disappear behind paywalls, methods stay under wraps, data sit in proprietary systems, and the disciplines rarely speak to one another. Whoever sets the categories, access points and formats retains interpretive power, while benefit and consequence-load come apart. This asymmetry is not a fringe phenomenon but structure-forming — it decides which questions may be asked at all and who profits from the answers.

The answer to this is not another discipline but a different way of working: research that orders across the boundaries and returns its results to where they belong — the public.

2 THE PRINCIPLE: SYNTAGMATIC RESEARCH

In linguistics a *syntagm* is the ordered combination of signs along an axis (de Saussure, 1916). Transposed to research: findings do not stand isolated side by side but are brought into relation — the connection between the fields is the actual subject. This is transdisciplinary in the strict sense, not merely multi- or interdisciplinary: it is not the stacking of disciplinary contributions but a production of

knowledge oriented toward problems rather than disciplinary boundaries (Gibbons et al., 1994; Nowotny et al., 2001).

In practice: technology and philosophy, natural science and art, medicine and law are not treated separately but referred to the same question. Whoever looks at a problem from another field sees what the trained view misses. The relations are not merely asserted but held and made verifiable in a *knotenwerk* (web of relations).

3 A RECURRING THREAD: THE RISK-DISPOSITION ASYMMETRY (P/Δ)

Some patterns appear across many fields in the same form. One is the risk-disposition asymmetry: whoever sets a category retains disposition over its interpretation (δ), while risk and consequence-load (ρ) fall elsewhere. This pattern can be traced as its own instance in economics, law, biology, education, culture and governance. Such threads connect the fields without narrowing them — they exemplify what the syntagmatic ordering makes visible: not a new discipline but a cross-cutting regularity.

4 OPENNESS AS METHOD

At Syntagma openness is not a later concession but procedure. It has four sides:

- **Open access.** Results belong in public, not behind a barrier — in the spirit of open access to scholarly literature (Budapest Open Access Initiative, 2002). Tools are open source (AGPL), texts freely licensed (CC BY).
- **Traceability.** Methods lie open, sources are cited, results stay verifiable and reusable — in the spirit of the FAIR principles for research data (Wilkinson et al., 2016).
- **Dissent as method.** Counter-positions are not a nuisance but part of the procedure — organised skepticism as a norm of science (Merton, 1973). No authority replaces re-examination.
- **Community and research input.** Research is a shared undertaking. Questions, findings and objections from outside are welcome; origin or title do not decide, the argument decides.

5 SOVEREIGNTY AND ETHICS

Openness without sovereignty would be dependence. Syntagma works EU-sovereign: own keys, own data, reproducible results, no binding to proprietary services that change the terms tomorrow. The infrastructure is deliberately portable — static, open source, without server compulsion — so the work stands on its own ground.

This includes a hard limit: no cooperation with military, weapons or defence industry — in licence, content and operation, without exception. Ethics here is not an appendix but an operating condition.

6 ORGANISATION: FROM PRIVATE STEWARDSHIP TO AN INSTITUTE

Syntagma currently runs under private stewardship. The corpus, tools and infrastructure are set up so they can be spun out and transferred into their own official body. The path is staged: own domain, public repository, open discourse channel, finally a legal form (in Austria usually a non-profit association first, a foundation in perspective). The legal form need not precede the work — the work stands on its own, the body follows. What matters is that identity and channels belong to Syntagma, so the separation stays clean.

7 INVITATION

This model is not a claim about the one right way to do research but an offer: a place where fields come into relation, results lie open and dissent belongs. Whoever shares the basic stance is invited to join the research — with a question, a finding, an objection, from whatever field.

§ REFERENCES

Budapest Open Access Initiative (2002). *Declaration.* budapestopenaccessinitiative.org.

de Saussure, F. (1916). *Cours de linguistique générale.* Payot, Paris.

Gibbons, M., Limoges, C., Nowotny, H., Schwartzman, S., Scott, P. & Trow, M. (1994). *The New Production of Knowledge.* SAGE, London.

Merton, R. K. (1973). The Normative Structure of Science. In: *The Sociology of Science.* University of Chicago Press. (Orig. 1942.)

Nowotny, H., Scott, P. & Gibbons, M. (2001). *Re-Thinking Science.* Polity Press, Cambridge.

Wilkinson, M. D. et al. (2016). The FAIR Guiding Principles for scientific data management and stewardship. *Scientific Data*, 3, 160018.