

Missing Context and Orientations in Modern Times: Outlining the Problematique of the Human Predicament and sharing Commons in a global Embodied Covenant

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Abstract. This document revisits the challenges and problems we face in times of unprecedented change across times and scales. It looks into how humans manage and mismanage their environment, and studies the underlying perceptions and conceptualizations, how we communicate and treat our fellows and the Nature around us. But instead of bashing a scapegoat, in this case science and technology, for causing unprecedented impacts with unknown consequences, the papers explores 1) our conceptual and cognitive limitations, 2) why we are at a loss when inflicting change without an idea of the scales and dynamics of the impacts, 3) why we are leaping in the dark, without any overview and orientation, without appropriate concepts and precepts. But instead of lamenting or blaming, it explores how we can better come to grips with the challenges, by being able to explore and negotiate the situation by designing extensional models to get at least the frames, scales and dimensions into a common context.

The focus of this paper is on the schemas, maps and models we create to make visible and sharable the extended realities around us, realms humans change with technological means, but for which we need concepts to realize concretely their impact. The paper revisits very central basic concepts, like “Space” and “House” and investigates what concepts like Oikos, Ecumene, Eudomy can help us to design “common grounds”.

There is emphasis on the notion that God is an “ecological” god, a creator who did not create Nature as a Dichotomy, Grid, or Schema, but as a Living Universe and that we have to revisit our over-claims and oversimplifications. See footnote [3] as we outline for the Culture of Peace Symposium that we need to add “overview and orientation” to counteract the impacts of overclaims and oversimplifications.

The paper revisits work done in the field of sign systems, representations and communications, and adds maps and models as super-signs and superstructures, as ways to combine different forms, modes, and models.

In essence, the papers shows that we can step back from a situation and check its outline, grid, range, width, and depth and draw sketches, scribbles, schemas, or maps and event design and build the situation as small-scale models in order to be able to jointly - with experts and the public - “negotiate” issues and relations and plot alternative approaches (futures). This creation of models which can display change in various cultures, across scales, fields and times, should be “normal practice”, something very common, but instead searchers and practitioners are confronted with modern day “dogmas” like: There is no overview, there is no orientation possible, postmodern Cyberculture nightmares [1] try to make us believe that all it doomed to failure and nightmares.

But instead the paper insists that Futures are not given, they are created and that we are responsible for our actions and tools and means we employ. Present Science and Culture all too often made us think in boxes, makes us label everything with a fixation on exact and linear description, the more we have lost control, the more we stick to exactness and definitions without considering the context and purpose. But Life and the Creation is not made to fit such a modern-times technology-driven dogma. This paper is to unsettle our belief in precision without concretion and context, in our fixation on terms, irrespective of the context and our shared imaginations and actions.

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General Orientation, Intention and a note of Caution:

Many aspects of this paper have been presented in various communities on regional and international level over the last 20 years, but in general with little impact, findings were greeted with ignorance or the typical muddling through, closing eyes or putting ones head into the sand.

This may have various reasons, it can be a result of 1) the complexity of overwhelming problems we face when confronting the environmental crisis, 2) an unprofessional articulation, writing and presentation by the author, 3) missing terms and shared experiences as the issues and impacts described are transcending scales, domains, and terminologies, transcending our personal experience and “Anschauung” or 4) the inability of science and technology to outline and keep in check the impacts created by exploring new “lands”, “themes” across scales and cultures without control over the impacts created by fiddling with new technological possibilities unaware of the impacts created. It is interesting to realise that the more we focus nowadays on complexity, the more we realise we are perplex, we ignore and discard anything not fitting the “picture” or the “box”, and avoid questioning what is in the hindsight.

Definitely the author agrees that his presenting and wording is inadequate, but how can that be different when we are more at “awe the more we gaze” (Santanya) in view of the beauty of the living Cosmos. The author believes that there are no adequate words and pictures as we have not been given the necessary perceptions and conceptions to realize the impact and dynamics we cause onto the environment and the Creation, and we have not created an appropriate ethics - an ethics with space and time horizon – as requested by the philosopher Hans Jonas in his “Principle Responsibility”. [2]

<p>The greatest single achievement of science in this most scientifically productive of centuries, is the discovery that we are profoundly ignorant; we know very little about nature and understand even less. <i>Lewis Thomas (1913-1993)</i></p>	<p>“Science is build up with facts as a house is with stones. But a collection of facts is no more science as a heap of stones is house”. <i>Henri Poincaré (1854-1912)</i></p>
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The main line of thought of this paper is, that we need other ways to outline – maybe call it embody and reify - the scales and effects we create in order help us to confront, instead of neglecting, the damage we inflict. As technology provides means and tools to impact on the micro-(nano-) and macro-scale, on various time-scales and in invisible “realms”, we also need to keep in check and have oversight of what we create, or which impacts we cause. In projects under the auspice of the International Science Community and Policy Makers the author has created, drawn and built models or schemas to at least outline the issues. This combination of model-spaces is called a Cognitive Panorama [3], and was also later presented as an Embodied Covenant [4] to other communities. But the sad fact is, that neither science and policy, nor our thinking and learning in schools, is ready to go beyond words and dualisms, labelling and box-thinking. Some writers called it “sectarianism of science”. [5] The author believes that science and technology has some homework to do, as they are liable to create impacts they can neither oversee nor control. These damages created are beyond the individual “turf” or “sector” of any ego, or any given discipline or application. So what seems needed is oversight or overview to be established beyond a certain domain, sector, position, or disciplinary verbiage and dogma. The footnote leads to an article by Nathan Keyfitz where he presents that we are educated to give disciplines advantage over “other” fields, and not to support inter-/trans-disciplinary collaboration.

The author has designed and presented spatial [6] models (consider it a sketch or scribble in 3-dimensions or a physical small-scale model) to help see domains of knowledge and activities in context. These model-spaces are used to jointly negotiate a situation across domains or sectors, scales, and times. This work has been published in many disciplines and sectors, but no community seems to be “in charge”, responsible to look beyond their cultural veil or beyond the prevailing scientific and technological approaches in order to confront other scales and dimensions, step back, or look at issues from a distance and under different aspects.

In the last years the religions have taken up the issues connected to environmental change, and have an eye on what is caused by irresponsibility and intellectual isolation and egoism. The author sees a need for an ecumenical look at the impacts created and the installation of a watchdog-function to secure responsible care for the planet and future generations. Modern Science has ignored the need to put its “house” [7] in “order”, is searching again for a “theory of everything” instead of being pragmatic and inviting discourse. Modern science avoids offering alternative, pragmatic maps and grids to help us frame topics and issues, and allow the negotiation of challenges which might inflict vast and fast deterioration caused by naïve and blind large scale experiments [8] at the expense of the Creation.

In the Conclusions below, the paper is revisiting the Original Prospectus of the Club of Rome report [9] as the prevailing ways of thinking and reasoning is seen to have much to do with the worsening of the global environmental situation. This is seen as a sign of the existential crisis and challenges we face as humanity by continuing “as usual”. We are fixated on being “right” and knowing, when in reality we are just closing our eyes and ignoring what we inflict onto others by not expanding our level of compassion and reducing the suffering in the world. [10]

1 INTRODUCTION

Our Chairman Dr. Alexandros Papaderos explained in his Foreword that Theology needs to be involved in finding solutions, that we need religion-based scientific approaches, and that God ('THEOS' in Greek), needs to be understood as an 'ecological' god. All agreed, the question remains what we mean by ecological and how we make this concrete so we can communicate and share with others, and avoid the impact we create when damaging Nature and all living things (the Creation).

The paper first revisits maps and models, and ways such constructs have been used in different cultures and belief systems. Maps can enable communication about geographical position and orientation, but can additionally enable communication about paths, goals and alternatives also in extended senses (e.g. flow charts of processes or structural charts showing relations among different aspects of an undertaking).

We then explore ways to extend that use, both the scales and the contents covered, and in particular by developing common frames of reference with a view to assisting communications among otherwise disparate points of view. The construction of "common frames of reference" [11] is a key method in extending "maps" to become "conceptual commons", common cognitive spaces.

The use of schemas or maps (with agreed upon scales and rules of map construction) is common to many cultures. Order-schemas or cosmologies in different cultures have been revisited [12], and there seems to be a high need to look into how they are used to communicate meanings and values and provide a discursive, communicative "frame" that makes sense.

Some cultures have created conceptual commons which go beyond lists of words, using imaginary depictions and models to relate issues, problem areas and solutions. Important in our context is that they can assist with sense making and help capacity building in participatory, dialogic process.

We explore ways to expand the boundaries and the range of issues we can display, embody and participatorily negotiate and change. We can add and negotiate frames in "common spaces" which include other sign systems, different scales, as well as additional thematic and media dimensions.

2 CHANGE ACROSS ALL DOMAINS, SCALES, PROBLEM-DOMAINS

Understanding Challenges connected to broad and rapid change, like

- 1) highly complex, diverse, dynamic and rapid **environmental change** along and across scales,
- 2) our moves beyond the meso-scale of our living world through the impact of **globalisation or global change**,
- 3) rapid dramatic multi-lingual and multicultural change influences or believe and value systems,
- 4) **change in signs system and media**, their use in daily life and the loss of lingual and cultural diversity.

All this implies the need to dramatically change the ways and means by which we represent, conceptualise, understand, and recombine, learn, teach, i.e. think and communicate in the broadest sense.

It is obvious that we are not "equipped" and can not adapt appropriately in view of the scales and the dynamics, and the different sign-representations involved. Gregory Bateson urged us to develop antenna for change so we can perceive temporal differences. In a series of the Konrad-Lorenz Institute [13] we discussed order schemas and how through "Emergence" we might be able to develop other ways, means, senses and ways to communicate and negotiate. Maybe see it as an extension of our Geographic Position Systems (GPS); who says that we can not agree upon various cultural landscapes and define Cultural Position Systems (CPS) [14] to see neighbourhoods and relations, patterns and overlaps in cultural "fields", just as we can find our ways in the physical world.

*"Whoever imagines mental barriers which actually do not exist
and then thinks them away, has understood the world.
As space is entrapped in geometry's network of lines,
thought is caught in its (own) inherent laws.
Maps make the world comprehensible to us;
we are still waiting for the star-maps of the spirit.
In the same way that ambling through fields
we risk getting lost, the spirit negotiates its terrain."
Friedrich Rückert, Wisdom of the Brahmins*

3 HOW CAN WE REACT TO THESE CHALLENGES?

Should we expand our focus and emphasis on individual values and actions and put more efforts to following the commandments and “golden rules”?

I believe YES, we should look into **Values and Ethics** but let us remember that this addresses primarily the individual, personal level. The religious-philosopher Hans Jonas requested [2] in his “Principle Responsibility” a future Ethics with Space and Time horizon. The philosophical anthropologist Helmuth Plessner showed that we are humans who can assume an ex-centric positionality [15] (we can assume diverse, multiple perspectives), and UNESCO wrote about Humans being “model-makers”, so we are not bound to the material, the physical, but can include intangible, imaginary, conceptual “dimensions” or aspects. One precondition is, that we stay concrete, so we can “negotiate” – and the “trick” recommended here is to use models with a certain, known fidelity and with a clear pragmatic purpose to help us with orientation and navigation, finding shared ways and means, instead of being correct or right or “knowing all and everything”. Central is the consideration that there is detail, domain and survey knowledge, so knowledge with a different granularity. By taking individual viewpoints out, and seeing issues from a distance, new insights can emerge. The challenge is to concert the different “Eyes” and Models [16], going beyond the detailed specialist view is correct and the generalists view is odd. We worked with oblique views or slants in ecological research (Schrägsichten) [17]. Maybe this is an image and metaphor to invite other positions and perspectives [18]. So let us explore assumptions about different positions and perspectives and shared and concert orientations one-by-one.

4 FALSE DICHOTOMIES, DILEMMATA AND WHERE ARE POSSIBLE POINTS OF DEPARTURE?

We are in the box, we think “in the box” with “our jargon” – we think in dualisms like: good vs. bad, black vs. white, heavenly vs. worldly, material vs. spiritual, given vs. not-given, “speciality” vs. university

We typically stick to our in-group terminologies, use our jargon in our well-bounded sectors or faculties. Let me focus only as an example on local vs. global, or special vs. global interest groups (SIGs vs. GIGs), in order to show that something “in-between” is missing. The founder of the General Model Theory and Systematic Neo-Pragmatism Herbert Stachowiak presented the spectrum of meaning, maybe call it shades of meaning depending on the context, Wolf presented an Encyclopaedia of Words in Space, so words are explained through their opposites and neighbourhoods, And in terminology research we spoke about “Concept and Context Mapping”. Another example is the presentation of “isms” [19]. or “schools of thought” in one coherent schema, maybe such schemas need to be extended and presented in greater detail, but take it as an example for a coherent presentation which can be negotiated, falsified, expanded-- all this is better than getting struck while struggling with definitions. If we accept that there is space between words and lines and extremes, we can for a moment imagine also space between dimensions, and with such an embodied and reified approach, making use of the human experience with extensional dimensions, were are already close to our trick leaving the extremes of dichotomies.

5 HUMANS AS “IN-BETWEENERS” AND “MODEL MAKING SPECIES”

“Think global” is the often cited motto and requirement since the Earth Summit in 1992 - but how? How can we act local when we do not know where we are? And do not “see” how fields of impacts relate and interact?

You say wait a minute, we use simulations of the distributions of non-point pollutions, we see the impact in simulations done in the Earth and Climate Sciences and there these models “show” the variations, gradients, and absorptions of liquids, gazes, what-have-you.... Yes in the last 20 years colour graphics visualization became fashionable. These models are 4-dimensional (space 3D and time 1D). The author worked for leading vendors at the beginning of Computer Graphics and multi-dimensional modelling and space-statistics (variograms). So he wants to stretch your imagination here: Already with Google Earth we can navigate, pan and zoom now, and this change of detail or granularity is another dimension – the challenge to navigate micro-meso-scales. Take this as another or extra dimensions and you have already 5 Dimensions – concrete positions you can identify and reach! – may they be physical in the geographic space or conceptual in a cognitive of model space. I have to leave you with this exercise of adding dimensions here, as our topic is hidden dogmas and fixations and how to overcome fundamentalism and dogmatisms. The author proposed 9 dimensional reference spaces called a cognitive Panorama as mentioned already. Curious readers might want to visit this internet site for further inspections www.9-d.org.

So let us step and slow down a little and revisit the process of adding perspectives and dimensions. “To solve a problem you need to take your own viewpoint out” is a quote you can find in one way or the other in many traditions. So to step-back or to find a high-stand seems obviously the right thing to do if you need directions. So what we are proposing here is conceptualize and think embodied by not taking extremes, but always considering meaning as a spectrum between the poles and outside and beyond this narrow focus on dichotomies. And in this way approach issues from different positions and distances. The astronauts for example were deeply impressed

when the Earth was hidden behind their thumb! – Perspective is a cognitive concept grounded in physical, optical experience. See the work of Veltman [20], spatial metaphors [6] and the “optics of ethics” [8, 20].

I owe the thinking about a spectrum of meaning and about models and pragmatics to Herbert Stachowiak. Here we can only mention this ground-braking life-achievements presented to UNESCO in “Scientific Thought” in 1972 and his General Model Theory and the Systematic Neo-Pragmatism. Also the UNESCO and Club of Rome Reports on Learning are highly recommended, as it is time to overcome and bridge the canyon between coded and non-coded, material vs. spiritual, or old and new thinking! All such “fundamentalist” thinking of knowing exact and drawing boundaries for inclusion and exclusion is a fallacy and inappropriate, and which needs to be carefully scrutinized as we are addressing living world questions and not finding the nearest connections between two points on a plane. We are living on dynamically changing, diverse and complex planet with many spheres and elements and so our approaches and tools need to be appropriate. We as humans can step conceptually out of the box and take in many viewpoints. See Jonas and Plessner mentioned above, and the entries in the Encyclopaedia of Systems and Cybernetics [21]. based on work developed over the last 20 years. See also the development of these concepts since 1986 as presented below. The central idea is to create models of the in-between, between the material and the spiritual, tangible and intangible, given or not-given, to help us share, visit, negotiate what is not directly visible or materially “at hand” and so helping us to avoid falling into extremes and fighting over fixations.

6 A TOUR RE RAISON: “GLOBAL CHANGE - “GLOCAL”, THE GLOBAL PROBLEMATIQUE AND THE CLUB OF ROME, DIALOGUE, GOVERNANCE AND PEACE-MAKING

The task of the author was as one contributor - and now curator - of the Global Change- Challenges to Sciences and Politics [22]. exhibition in 1990, to present for example on one simple, concise poster the answer to the question: “What is the System Earth?” This has lead to building an extensional model, so we have in a model-space with axis-dimensions, the different subjects or disciplines (areas of knowing), scales (micro-meso-macro), and the timelines or markings of episodes and epochs on whatever temporal scale. This extensional model or context space is linked to the physical space as we know it from geographic co-ordinates, and a multi-lingual repository space as developed for library sciences and switching systems. This combination of physical spaces and model spaces is called a Cognitive Panorama [3].). At that time the term “Glocal” was coined for the spectrum between micro-meso-macro and found its way into the Wikipedia. [23]

So let us for a moment consider the spectrum and space between extremes: local-global, positive-negative, etc. Why not embody it in a man-made physical or imaginary model for a given purpose and with the help of these models find a language and be able to point at and outline issues so that experts and the public, observers and interests groups can deliberate by not just using word and fighting over definitions and meanings. This work on dialog, participation and mediation is another aspect which “evolved” and needs to be visited later or at other places... [24].

This work –developed over 20+years - was published in various subject areas, but as it is the case with many integrative, holistic but concrete approaches, is not connected and related to other subject areas or disciplines. The story of the opening session of the Founders of General Systems is most revealing, beyond the core team only few scientists concerned themselves with the bigger picture, all reacted in nearly the same way, saying: “This is not my field” [25] avoiding to look at a bigger picture, as being aware of a bigger schema makes one responsible for wider affairs. The author is desperate that even when the US Research Council and Academies list his work in collections of “Grand Environmental Challenges” [26] nobody seems to be in “charge”, and finds this is the traditional domain of their field.

Presenting at EcoTHEE is for the author a new audience, which only responded to his work only in the last 3 years. Maybe scholars from such deeper “Fields”, who looked into communications and ecumene, symbols, images and metaphors find merit in revisiting more recent views on maps and models as supersigns [27] and are ready to invest some time in tackling the challenges described. Reports on earlier struggling with communities addressing consciousness, ethics, law, peace,... are available and might help to overcome the normal struggle for shared meaning. Already mentioned above, another scholar, Kim Veltman should be revisited as his work done in search for Cybermonasteries might help to lay open the challenges and chances of deep reflection and hard work.

Now the work in the field of religious studies is a new subject area, a news domain for the author. He addresses in the last 15 years more and more the field of education and has addressed religious or spiritual audiences in the last 5 years, as awareness and consciousness are subjects where humanities and religious sciences could jointly make an effort. This started with Consciousness Conferences around Systems Societies and the Club of Budapest, and involved groups around the Earth Charter, Environment, Ecological Health and Justice [4], and various Religious Studies groups focussing on space and the material and immaterial in various cultures, for example nature spaces and the sacred. See Oikos, Ecumene,... paper [7]

7. CONCLUSIONS – IN A NUTSHELL

Media and Signs

Above you find again a text in the usual alphanumerical, sequential format. But as we have shown, trying to put into words living extended and highly varied and dynamic “matters” is not possible. We have to compromise and hopefully trigger imagination and new courses of action. The religions have a long history of using what today are call “cross media”, using images, icons, symbols, words, metaphors and stories, the hope is to get some help from our belief systems to revisit the basic assumptions, conceptions and impacts of modern technology and science driven Mankind.

Predicament and the Problematique

We realise more and more the hubris of science when misusing planning and prognosis, by just extrapolating trends and selected certain available data for *prognostic futures*, ignoring *normative* and *participative futures*. Modern technology driven futurists seem to believe only in *engineering blueprints* and neglecting *architectonic aesthetic design* and allowing little space for the not-given and sacred, and so are our modern education and policy systems, oversimplifying, over-claiming and over-compromising, trying through ignorance to handle challenges in under-complex and inhumane ways

For the author the early works of the Club of Rome nearly 40 years ago were decisive. His teachers introduced him not only to the Limits to Growth and the fight in the media about “words” and “dogmas” as there are now natural growths, linear growths, exponential growths,... but people fight over words and close their eyes.... For the author writing his Diploma in Engineering the “Methodenstreit” was important. Fact is, that educated and good willing people ran away from each other as they could not find a common language, instead fighting over a word like “system” instead of being able to present what they mean and in which context. This led later to the Clash within the Club of Rome in 1970 when one group within the Club favoured the new possibilities of computer modelling, and the other insisted on looking onto the whole picture. See architectural design versus engineering blueprint above. The oversimplification of “technological fixes” lead people to believe that they just need to make a list of problems, and then one by one, tackling the problems, the “big ones” first, one by one. The other looks deeper by looking into interdependencies, how one action has repercussions onto the other and how “drivers” are invisible when the issues are overwhelming for an individual approach, being extremely complex, diverse, and dynamic,...

The author was pushed into concerning himself and presenting global issues, but trained to present local and regional issues in maps and models, as planners and architects do, he can only check what might be possible with the tools he used in the past. Please excuse his “way out” by trying to capture the potentials of imagination, planning and design and revisiting basic tools, approaches and concepts connected to “SPACE” and “MAPS and MODELS”.

A way out ? Education, Dialogue and Governance

Even as kids playing in the sand-box we are used to negotiating situations, even military simulation and “gaming” are using such modelling. But when we try to step “out-of-the box” and do “paradigm-mapping” we are confronted with ignorance and negligence. I would like to report on more recent work on Education [28], Governance [29], and Dialog and Decision Cultures [30] and modern communication methods play an important role for future solution, but such wide topics need to be published another time, even when I feel that the application side of the proposed mental models/concepts proposed need to be considered and emphasized [31].

So let me close with mentioning workshops called OUT OF THE BOX THINKING and PARADIGM MAPPING as developed for and with foreign students in 80ies, and now being continued as youth workshops, where we train the intercultural negotiation and reflection of other positions, perspectives, backgrounds, concepts at other places in different times.

It needs to be mentioned here that the work with youth is essential, not just a life-spring for creative, cognitive and imaginative new thinking. Combining it with the old traditional, rooted, concrete and solid thinking of traditions is in my view essential as too much abstract, lunatic, intangible thinking is part of the problems we have ourselves created and we are facing today.

Show or Schau?

In a nutshell: Are we opting for an abstract, disembodied conceptual world full of ignorance and negligence, or are we going into times of sharing and compassion? The hope is that we avoid the temptations of “Show” [32] and the ANGST towards final questions. But again this is the field of religion. This paper is about the possible infliction of suffering by irresponsible use of technological a scientific ways and means. The discussion “Is Humanity destined to self-Destruct” invited many answers, many were pessimistic, the approach presented here is

trying to confront and tackle the issues raised, and not giving in as it is a duty to take care and protect the Creation: Go beyond the believe of fate we are “destined” and not responsible, [32,2] and share details and outlines in shared orientations [3] as the Human Predicament and the Problematique [9] needs to be revisited!

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