INX 4 Paradigm Shift
A Holistic Research Programme

Towards a Society of Living: Integrating different anticipatory designs from Complexity Theory and Life Sciences for Transformation

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A Hypercomplex Society ➞

“Complexity is not a problem to be “solved” or minimized at all costs. [On] the contrary, complexity is the solution.”

“The functional objective of society is not to create “order” out of “chaos,” but to manage complexity by complexity”

(Lars Qvortrup, The Hypercomplex Society, 2003)
Large systems change needed → compared to incremental change

Human development in harmony with

• Ourselves, in a social and equitable way

• The environment, in an ecological way, respectful of life and planet at large

Transformation

... fundamental, persistent and irreversible change across society ... the process through which social innovation gain durability, scale and transformative impact by interlocking with systems innovation, narratives on change, game-changers and societal transformation (Avelino et al 2014; p14)
Development of new scientific theoretical frameworks

*Transition (management) literature* most recurrent used theory so far.

*Transition* seen as a **building block** of *Transformation* (Griffith et al. 2010 De Haan and Rotmans 2011)

*Transition*: “Meaning Transition from state A to state B by the help of technological invention” (simplification)

**Multi-Level Perspective** (Rip and Kemp, 1998; Geels, 2002; Smith et al., 2005)

**Technological Innovation Systems** approach (Hekkert, 2007). Most of the transformation research is rooted in transition management schools analyzing *socio-technical systems* (Patterson, James, et al. 2015)

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Importance of **pioneer initiatives** created in niches

- Pioneer initiatives emerge in **protected spaces**
- Window of opportunity
- Top-down pressure (policies, narratives) supports the uplifting of the initiatives in the existing system
Examples of pioneer initiatives:
• *The Transition Town Movements,*
• *The Commoning Movements,*
• *The Common Good Economy,*
• *Degrowth Movements* and many more
(Complementary Currencies, Performance Economy, Extax project, General Basic Income etc.)

Pioneer initiatives = capacity of *catalyzing large systems change* which induce *new society models*

“Niches are protected spaces where projects can develop away from the normal selection pressures of mainstream systems, offering supportive networks to allow experimental new systems to take shape (...).”

(Smith and Raven, 2012)
• Scaling-up (*grow in scale*, diffusion) process, *overcome path dependencies* and *systemic lock-ins* → does it work?

• Example: *The Sharing Economy*, a pioneer initiative developed initially by the open source community...what happened →

“The response to climate change, the ecosystem in trouble, the distribution of wealth, to an economic crisis that gave no respite for years, is the sharing economy, the economy at zero marginal cost.”

(Jeremy Rifkin, Zero Marginal Cost, 2014)
What happened to the Sharing Economy:

[Diagram]

What happened to the Sharing Economy:

[Diagram]
These frameworks have immensely enriched the transformation research which is still in its infancy and needs further theory building however...

• Lack to address the process of large systems change by upscaling niche initiatives
• Mechanistic, newtonian and technical innovation inspired model (Bottom-up/top-down)
• Focus on incremental change (Patterson et al.2014)
• Constant-cause explanation ➜ assumes that one causal factor operates and catalyze emergence, decline, transformation
• Assume very often that technology defines socio-technological configurations
• « transition to ... » not yet clear and lack of consensus

Aim:

• Design a research agenda which fully integrates the “Society of Living”, integrating complexity science, systems dynamics, systems thinking and in general interdisciplinarity
• Develop new heuristic models and theoretical frameworks to strengthen the capacity of diffusion of new societal models
• Anticipation of systems in order to strengthen these models
Example:

« Autopoiesis »

Auto = self
Poiesis = creation, production

Chilean and Argentinian biologists
Humberto R. Maturana
Francisco J. Varela

- Means **self-creation** and is synonymous with circularity, **recursion** and **self-referentiality**

- A system is « autopoietic » if the whole produces the parts or elements from which it is made of

- A direct **transfer** of the concept to a « **social system** » is possible and most have failed
• Niklas Luhmann’s autopoietic system
• Did not apply the original concept to the social domain, formed a general transdisciplinary concept open to re-specification
• Social systems consist of communications between individuals not the individuals themselves
• Social systems reproduce themselves on the basis of communication, their elements are not physical but elements of meaning

http://unifiedtao-en.blogspot.it/2011/05/autopoiesis-of-tdo.html
• Consciousness of the **self-referential character of the system** enables **pioneer initiatives to anticipate** the appropriation of initiatives by the system
• Work on self-referential capitalist systems (Bob Jessop 2001)
Conclusions

• Our anticipatory models regarding pioneer initiatives need new theoretical frameworks
• New research agenda which integrates learnings from systems dynamics, complexity sciences based on a « Society of Living »

“ Asking the proper question is the central action of transformation, (because).....the key question causes germination of consciousness.”

Clarissa Pinkola Estes (Women who run with the wolves, p 52)