

IDEAS ABOUT AN URBAN LIFE WITHOUT GROWTH

Permaculture Design Course – The City of the Future

INTRODUCTION

Within the last ten years the Institute of Soil research at the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences has organised several Erasmus Intensive programs with the topic “Responsible Use of Soil and Land and Regional Development”¹ (IPSOIL). The goal of this IP was to work out a common vision for measures against uncontrolled sealing and damage of soil and land, intending a balanced production and also developing concrete measures for integrated land utilisation and to initiate a ‘learning region’.

In continuation of the theoretical project ‘soil and land’ we were also organising practical courses in ‘Permaculture Design’.² Central to permaculture are the **three ethics**: care for the earth, care for people, and fair share. They form the foundation for permaculture design and are also found in most traditional societies. The 12 principles of permaculture as described by David Holmgren are basic thoughts for our work.³

Our conception for the definition of permaculture has a subtle distinction to the original interpretation of Bill Mollison⁴. Within an antithesis to a primarily understanding of processing of agriculture, and production of edibles, we get the idea of an inter-disciplinary field of research, how it is carefully worded by Hans-Peter Dürr, with the objective of improving the living conditions and well-being of humans for a liveable future. Therefore we are also engaged with the eco-systems of the planet on a global, regional and local level.

1. GENERAL QUESTIONS ABOUT OUR MYTH FOR GROWTH

From a world of seemingly unlimited resources, mankind is gradually accustoming itself to the Earth as a limited, crowded and finite space, with limited resources for extraction and a narrowing capacity for waste disposal of pollution. Jean-Claude Trichet, June 2008⁵

There’s no way the whole world could get rich the way Americans and Europeans did, even if we didn’t care about the consequences. The ‘**Western model**’ of development is bankrupt.⁶ Another two decades of the status quo will make many of our goals nearly impossible. Every passing year makes it more difficult to raise billions of people out of poverty to become parts of stable, democratic states with functioning economic, legal, and health systems.⁷

An increase of as little as two degrees Celsius in average **global temperature** would heat global politics to a boiling point and trigger massive conflicts over scarce food and water. We have to decarbonise our economies wholesale, and if we haven’t reached zero greenhouse - gas emissions globally by 2050 then the second half of this century will not be a time you would choose to live in.⁸

¹ IP SOIL <http://academia-danubiana.net/?p=265>

² PERMAKULTUR Zertifikatskurs http://academia-danubiana.net/documents/2010j_A.D.6-2010_Permakultur_Gruenner_10.02.01.pdf

³ 12 Principles of Permaculture by David Holmgren <http://justlists.wordpress.com/2010/01/14/principles-of-permaculture/>

⁴ Kvarda, Werner (2012): Betrachtungen zum wissenschaftlichen Diskurs in der Permakultur. <http://academia-danubiana.net/?p=410>

⁵ From a speech by Jean-Claude Trichet, President of the European Central Bank to a conference in Barcelona, in June 2008; as reported in The Times.

⁶ STEFFEN, Alex; ed.(2011): WORLDCHANGING; Publ. by ABRAMS in N.Y. ISBN 978-0-8109-9746-2, p.19

⁷ I.c.: STEFFEN (2011) p.21

⁸ DYER, Gwynne (2010): CLIMATE WARS. The fight for survival as the world overheats. One World Publications. Oxford, N.Y.

But, if we spend the next two decades in action, we may be surprised at how much different life will be in forty years. Some of the changes a zero impact future will demand are solutions we've only just recently come to accept, ... like converting from fossil fuels to wind and solar energy.⁹ We have to leave our affluence model which is unsavable because of its chronic dependency of growth. The modern states were running permanent with a growing tendency into dept. The ruthless exploitation of fossil, minerals and metal etc. resources was supplying our economic growth model.¹⁰

In the foreword of the book *Worldchanging*¹¹ Van Jones is writing “**Western nations** are getting more and more ethnically diverse, but less and less economically prosperous. We have just a few years to learn how to live together if we want our children to have a future worth living in. That’s reality in the twenty-first century.” *Worldchanging* is a kind of distillate of that new world. To read this book is to understand the range of solutions from which we can draw to build a workable future, and to glimpse a **vision** what that future might look like.

2.. ARCHITECTURE OF KNOWLEDGE INTEGRATION FOR THE IP

Joint problem solving among science, technology and society means that universities and other publicly-funded research institutions need to open themselves to collaboration with practice and with groups from outside academia.¹² If we work with different academic disciplines jointly with stakeholders from the region to rethink the ecological limits of a finite planet, the major tool for reaching it, is transdisciplinarity. Transdisciplinarity is a new form of learning and problem solving, involving cooperation among different parts of society and academia. Transdisciplinarity requires methods fostering integration of knowledge. The architecture of knowledge integration distinguishes between + understanding, + conceptualizing and + causal explaining.

In analogy with the social technology of the theory ‘U’ from C.O. Scharmer we realise a sequence of three movements and seven essential leadership capacities that a core group must cultivate:

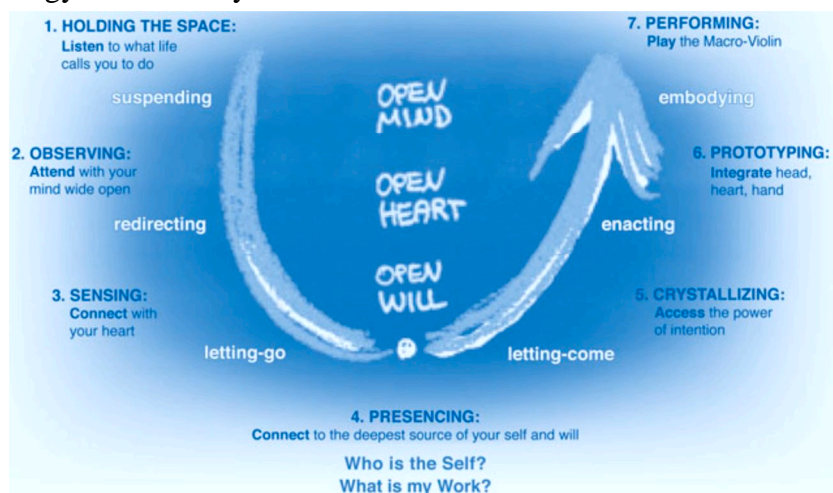
1. Holding the space. 2. Observing 3. Sensing 4. Presencing 5. Crystallizing 6. Prototyping 7. Performing¹³

Scharmer calls the whole process –

+ observe, observe;

+ access your sources of stillness and knowing;

+ and act in an instant – the U process, because it can be depicted and understood as a U-shaped journey.



⁹ I.c.: STEFFEN (2011) p.22

¹⁰ PAECH, Niko (2012): Befreiung vom Überfluss. Auf dem Weg in die Postwachstumsökonomie. München, Oekom

¹¹ STEFFEN, Alexander (ed.): WORLDCHANGING; Publ. by ABRAMS in N.Y. ISBN 978-0-8109-9746-2 p.6

¹² KLEIN, J T / GROSSENBACHER / MANSUY / HÄBERLI / BILL / SCHOLZ / WELTI (2002): Transdisciplinarity, Joint Problem solving among Science, Technology and society. An effective Way for Managing Complexity. Basel-Boston+Berlin: Birkhäuser et al., p. 15

¹³ SCHARMER, C. Otto (2008): Uncovering the blind spot of Leadership.

<http://www.dailygood.org/story/450/uncovering-the-blind-spot-of-leadership-c-otto-scharmer/>

2.1.. UNDERSTANDING – PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

For **understanding** the case of a real-world problem within its history, constraints, dynamics, and uniqueness we need key epistemics of cognition by empathy, feeling, pictorial representation in memory and intuitive comprehension.

First movement called 'observe, observe, observe. It means to stop downloading and start listening. It means to abandon our habitual ways of operating and immerse ourselves in the place of most potential for the situation we are dealing with.

1.. **Listen to what life calls you to do. Holding the space.** You must keep your attention focused on the highest future possibility of the group.

The Intensive program will start with an introductory lecture session and discussion about the four topics. Ecology, Architecture & Spatial Planning, Solidarity Economy, Culture & Identity.

2.. **Observing.** Observe with an open mind by suspending your voice of judgement, this means shutting down the habit of judging based on past experience and open up a new space of inquiry and wonder.

In addition to the lectures we prepare three excursions to hear about the biodiversity of the national park, to see a bio-wine-farm and a workshop about renewable energies.

2.2.. CONCEPTUALIZING

At the second level a shift occurs from a holistic real-world perspective, at the first level, to a system model level. In the middle level, synthesis is an important step for establishing methods of knowledge integration.

Second movement: retreat and reflect – allow the inner knowing to emerge. This requires going to the inner place of stillness where knowing comes to the surface. We listen to everything we learned while 'observing', and we attend to what wants to emerge. We pay particular attention to our own role and journey.

3.. **Sensing.** The process involves the tuning of three instruments: the open mind, the open heart and the open an idealized planning democratizing and search is that it gives from 'common ground'

Foto: Students in Aspern-



will. A future search conference¹⁴ is process of learning, empowering, partnering. The power of a future people the tools they need to build and to visualize a shared destination.

Seestadt elaborating a mind map. IP PDC-AS

4..**Presencing.** A blend of the words 'presence' and 'sensing', presencing signifies a heightened state of attention that allows individuals and groups to operate from a future space of possibility that they feel wants to emerge.¹⁵

At the Spiekerooger conversation talks¹⁶, the Wuppertal-Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy, and several University Institutes have established a forum, to discuss the procedure, how to interact in the areas of conflict about climate change and climate protection. Within a tangible situation of transformation and determination we have to **improvise**. This is an interesting outcome of the discussion, to improvise about a certain topic in a defined auditory space, just to pick up a symbol out of jazz. And we need also alternative professional exponents with the wisdom of the ecology movement. For that matter first and foremost we have to learn from each other.

¹⁴ WEISBORD, Marvin, R. (1993): Discovering Common Ground. San Franzisko: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

¹⁵ SCHARMER, C. Otto / Käufer, Katrin (2008): Führung vor der leeren Leinwand. Presencing als soziale Technik. http://www.ottoscharmer.com/docs/articles/2008_ZOE_01_Scharmer_NEU.pdf

¹⁶ 3. Spiekerooger Klima Gespräche 2011. Hrsg.: Reinhard Pfriem. Dvb Deutscher Buchverlag GmbH, Oldenburg 2012. ISBN978-3-86622-034-8

C. Otto Scharmer has generated an interesting metaphor for **joint learning**. We can learn a lot from performing with a dialogue with gruben. We can start with the process of a creative a blank canvas. The from inside. We invite IP, to use their whole competence for an climate change, saving



Foto: Oscar Holub and Prof. Nick Titz in the 'Gerbgruben'

ing artists. We will start artists in the Gerb- the artist a mutual composition in front of ambition is coming the participants of the experience and effectual handling of resources and fairness.

5. Crystallizing. Access the power of Intention. Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. The participants of the IP start to form a group. This is the beginning of the project work.

2.3..EXPLAINING

Finally on the third level it is the **epistemic** of causal explanation based on arguments.

Third movement: acting in an instant.¹⁷ This means to prototype the new in order to explore the future by doing, to create a little landing strip of the future that allows for hands-on testing and experimentation.

6.. Prototyping. Integrating Head, Heart and Hand. Moving down the left side of the U is about opening up and dealing with the resistance of thought, emotion, and will; moving up the right side is about intentionally reintegrating the intelligence of the head, the heart, and the hand in the context of practical applications.

During the second week of the IP we are operating with Project instruction, which enables the participants, to work in an open process, identifying the problems and developing concepts for realization.

7. Performing.

Performing a final presentation like the IPSOIL project with Jazz music and dancing.



Foto: Sandrine Vidal explaining the results of the 'soil and land' project at the Vinothek in Neusiedl am See.

3.. CONCLUSION

For the advanced economies of the western world, prosperity without growth is no utopian dream. It is a financial and ecological necessity.¹⁸ We want to explain for the city of Neusiedl am See the kind of living which means 2tCO₂/per person by 2050 - instead of 7 - 11 CO₂ t/per person/a - at the moment within industrial countries. We've never had more tools at hand for changing how cities are built¹⁹, with radical new architectural designs, we're capable of making structures that use 90 % less energy than the ones the last generation built, for our purpose of finding a basic approach for a Zero Carbon city within the next decades.

¹⁷ SCHARMER Uncovering the Blind Spot of Leadership. <http://www.dailygood.org/story/450/uncovering-the-blind-spot-of-leadership-c-otto-scharmer/>

¹⁸ JACKSON, Tim (2009): Prosperity without growth. Economics for a finite planet. London, Earthscan

¹⁹ See also the '2000 Watt society' in Zurich (Switzerland), or Kaindorf (Stmk.) and Güssing (Bgl.) in Austria.