Community Development and Renaissance Social Humanism -
Some Lessons for Systems Science[1]

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Abstract

Starting from the crisis in our communities – research has indicated it to be widely spread – the author explores the scientific tradition preceding the rise of modernism in order to draw out a more humane way of thinking that may be help our contemporary societies. He discerns between two types of Renaissance humanism, one characterised by its cleverness, the other by its compassion and desire to restore dignity to the lives of people struggling to escape the clutches of medievalism. The father of the latter is Erasmus of Rotterdam and we follow the development of his conception of a social humanism as it branches out, through the work of his successors, into every scientific discipline, both natural and human. These disciplines are united by an embracing systemic idea of philosophy that unites the mind with the heart and which Erasmus called "Philosophia Christi". We examine the two main pillars upon which this philosophy is built, love for our neighbour and education as the only legitimate instrument to change society, and the extraordinary impact it had on science and on communities living in the 17th Century. We contrast this with the idea of power, the chosen instrument of modernity to transform society, and trace some of its tragic outcomes. We conclude by discussing the incorporation of an Erasmian type of social humanism into systems education and the future development of such programmes.

1 Introduction

More than 30 years, while living in Australia, my wife and I noticed a crisis starting from families that branched out like an ivy into all other civic institutions in our community. Both of us were then postgraduate students in sociology and, confronted with these circumstances, we began to direct our research towards the problem of community disintegration. Our disenchantment with positivism, which still dominates the social sciences, led us to seek the intellectual heritage and more humane foundation for science. But it was not simply a matter of reproducing the past for, on discovering general systems theory, we saw in it a contemporary paradigm that would allow us to give renascence to the old humanist values.

This venture became a long journey, not only intellectually but also geographically, which took us from Australia to the U.S., then to Sweden and from Sweden back to Australia. Our research work became the systemic development of communities and the design of university programmes geared toward them. These programmes were naturally based on the methodology developed through our research. As we worked in regional universities, we designed programmes to equip our students with an ethical and professional competence to enable them to carry out their vocation in rural towns. We tried to avoid their migrating into

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[1] Opening address, 6th Brazilian Systems Conference, Universidade Estadual do Oeste do Paraná, Iguazu, October 2010. Translated from the Spanish original by the author.

the big city in search of money and material success. Here, I want to examine the role that the humanities must play in the systemic approach – especially in their quest to capture all essential totality[2] – to support the restoration and development of the community.

2 The Current Crisis in the Community

I will start with a brief account of the predicament in which most communities find themselves today. Individualism, which is an integral element of modernity[3], has been one of the most serious threats to humanity and our natural environment. From it also emerges the destruction of our communities. Like wolves, humans are social creatures, we have to hunt with our pack to live. Our community is our pack, we are not like tigers that hunt and live independently; if our community disintegrates, our spirit dies. Now, the destruction of the human pack has been a long historical process that is well worth studying to understand what is happening to us today. But here, I will limit myself to mention the most common factors that threaten our community at present and which we have identified in studies of several communities in Europe, including Sweden, Spain, Italy, France, Austria and most recently Australia. In all these communities we observe the following:

1. decline in ethics and charitable attitude among people;
2. absence of meaning and vocation in work and its detachment from service to humanity;
3. a management style that exploits human life, technology and the natural environment to accumulate financial resources instead of using these resources and technology to sustain humanity and the natural environment;
4. fragmentation and lack of leadership in all social groups, including the family;
5. deterioration, and in many cases the collapse, of primary, secondary and higher educational institutions;
6. abuse of the press and other media for commercial purposes that harm the most vulnerable sectors of society, especially youth;
7. lack of vision due to confusion and erosion of beliefs;
8. a mental state of fear, anxiety and depression that leads in the most extreme cases, to suicide especially among indigenous people, farmers and children;
9. destruction of the natural environment and dismissal of the repeated warnings that we are depleting the earth's natural resources.

Other studies have found that these factors are not unique in Europe or in economically developed countries but, on the contrary, are found in various regions of the world. This research, aimed specifically at sustaining culture, has shown that in this respect there is not much difference between villages in Africa, certain neighbourhoods in Berlin and villages in northern Sweden. Although each of these factors is harmful in itself, the situation is far more serious when one considers the links between one factor and the other. In systemic terms, this creates a positive feedback that destabilises the community and precipitates it towards collapse. I have drawn six of these factors and their links in Figure 1 with a central line (dot and dash) that hypothetically represents the equilibrium position of each of these factors. This line does not mean that social stability is rigid; my intention is only to graphically represent the principle enunciated by Ashby (1976) that tells us that in a set of sub-systems, the equilibrium of the total system will not be achieved until each sub-system has reached its own equilibrium. In a social context, this amounts to saying that the community will be unviable until each of

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[2] I wish to emphasize the focus on the totality that characterises a systemic philosophy and which unfortunately, has been partly lost in the rise of systems specialities.

[3] I use the word *modernity* in a manner that includes what is called *postmodernity*. This term suggests that modernity is something that was in the past, but this not true. Modernity has found its widest expression in postmodernity, therefore, it is more appropriate to call it *hypermodernity*.

these factors are restored to their norm. This in turn requires a vision about aspects such as
ethics, economics, education and justice that characterise a civilised community. It also
requires knowing how to realise this vision. This knowledge corresponds to the concept of
systemic cultural stability that I represent with an arrow (also dot and dash) in Figure 1.
Stability is the ability of a system to restore equilibrium once it has been lost. Adopting this
principle, we can define community development as the transformation into what we culturally[4]
should be.

Figure 1 ABOUT HERE

In addition to knowing how a chaotic community becomes civilised, we also need to know
historiology, which Ortega y Gasset (1987) defined as the systemic science of history. This
teaches us that the transition from chaos to social equilibrium is not linear, but follows an
exponential pattern over time as plotted in Figure 2 (de Raadt, 1991). The vertical axis
measures the transformation of a society and the horizontal axis stands for time. Let us assume
that the dot and dash line represents states where the transformation of society is proportional
to the effort invested in transforming it. This defines two stages in the development of the
community: start-up and maturity. The start-up generates a deficit, the social change we
obtain is proportionally less than the effort we apply. Maturity generates a surplus; the social
change is proportionally greater than our effort. Unfortunately, social change is very slow, so
that the start-up lasts at least a generation, that is, about twenty years. This means there must
be people willing to work at the beginning for results they will probably never fully enjoy. It is
sometimes cynically said that these are people who are born before their time, but this is not
true. These are people who live what Unamuno (2005) and Ortega y Gasset (1995) call
historical lives, people who have a vision that transcends the immediate horizon and extends
into the future. This projection into the future is driven by a Samaritan ethic, an ethic of *agape*
love that has been discussed in detail elsewhere (de Raadt, J. D. R. (2000, 2001); de Raadt, J.
D. R. & de Raadt, Veronica D. (2004, 2005, 2008); de Raadt, Veronica D. (2002)). It is a type
of ethics, I heard my wife recently say, that does not gather treasures on earth, but in heaven
(Matthew 6: 19-20) . And heaven and earth do not symbolise geographic locations, but refer to
these two historical periods we have defined above.

Figure 2 ABOUT HERE

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3 The Renaissance

In our search for a model for the development of the community we have found our
inspiration in the humanist Renaissance. The word renaissance suggests itself a social
transformation, but has something special: it is based on an offshoot and we need this offshoot
to collect the wisdom of the past. The Renaissance furnished two types of humanism. One of
them is elitist-humanism rooted in Greek philosophy and had its greatest impact in Italy. Its
major contribution was in the fine arts and architecture, but, given the elitist element inherited
from the Greek, it lacked the social influence that characterised the second type of humanism.
This is Christian humanism or social humanism of northern Europe. Although this humanism
did not entirely reject Greek thought, it only included those elements that harmonised with its

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[4]de Raadt (1998), explains the difference between culture, which is normative, and background, which is
determinative.

social agenda and historic work of human emancipation introduced in the Gospels (Erasmus, 2004). It opposed the Greek thought that only benefited the privileged and excluded those considered inferior, such as slaves and women. The father of social humanism was Erasmus of Rotterdam and although, his influence was strongest in northern Europe, he also had followers in the Spanish humanist movement until it was eliminated by the Inquisition.

In a very subtle manner, typical of his science, Erasmus replaced medieval [5] theology with "The Philosophy of Christ" (2004), a philosophy based on the Biblical concept of wisdom motivated by *agape* love for humanity. In contrast to the abstract nature of Aristotelian philosophy, Erasmus proposed a practical and social philosophy built on the natural sciences and humanities and based on empirical observation. Among the most notable disciples of Erasmus are the famous pedagogues Juan Luis Vives and Phillip Melanchthon, who already in their times talked about a systemic philosophy which, like the trunk of a tree, united the sap from its various roots. Each of these roots represent a specific scientific discipline (Erasmus, 1978; Melanchthon, 1999; Vives, 1971) and are linked to an idea that, four hundred years later, von Bertalanffy expressed thus:

> The world is ... like a Neapolitan ice cream cake where the levels - the physical, the biological, the social and the moral universe - represent the chocolate, strawberry, and the vanilla layers. We cannot reduce strawberry to chocolate - the most we can say is that possibly in the last resort, all is vanilla, all mind or spirit. The unifying principle is that we find organisation at all levels. (1971, p. 48)

The humanist philosophy gave northern Europe a great social and cultural impulse and the Dutch Republic was one of the most remarkable epicentres, especially during the seventeenth century. Not only did the human sciences blossom, but through the development of empirical methods, great breakthroughs were provided by Boerhaave in medicine, Carl Linnaeus in botany, van Leeuwenhoek and Swammerdam in biology and the use of the microscope, Beeckman in mathematics, Stevin in engineering and Grotius in international and maritime law. We must also include here the statesmen Johan de Witt and Johan van Oldebarnevelt, all of whom transformed "…a wretched little country of boatmen and peasants…[who] had no university" (Huizinga, 2007) into:

> …a society, and culture, which regularly fascinated contemporary diplomats, scholars, merchants, churchmen, soldiers, tourists, sailors and connoisseurs of art from many lands... Visitors continually marvelled at the prodigious extent of Dutch shipping and commerce, the technical sophistication of industry and finance, the beauty and orderliness, as well as cleanliness, of the cities, the degree of religious and intellectual toleration to be found there, the excellence of the orphanages and hospitals, the limited character of ecclesiastical power, the subordination of military to civilian authority and the remarkable achievements of Dutch art, philosophy, and science. (1995, p. 1)

The humanist philosophy gave conscience, vision and method. Through it, Northern Europe became aware firstly of the decrepit state of its society, secondly of a vision for a civilised community and thirdly of the science and technology which could realise this vision. This also replaced the authority exercised by the ecclesiastical hierarchy and the aristocracy with the study of the Bible both in the scriptures and in nature because, according to the humanists, God spoke through both (Jorink, 2004).[6] The humanities in particular, said the humanist Juan Luis Vives, "... restore our humanity." (1971). With this restoration, the progress of the natural sciences – neglected by medievalism – was stimulated. Nevertheless, they always remained integrated with the humanities in a reciprocal relationship, or in cybernetic jargon, *in a mutual*

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[5] Theology is a discipline of Greek origin, which Aristotle (2010) placed alongside the speculative sciences together with mathematics and physics. It is quite foreign to the Bible, its thoughts are closer to the concept of historiology as defined by Ortega y Gasset (1987).

[6] The revelation of God through nature was the foundation of the empirical method used both in the humanities and the natural sciences.

feedback. This led to an elegant, cultured and fully human science, as evidenced by the following passage from the book *Praeludia Sponsalarium Plantarum* about the sexuality of plants written by Linnaeus, the "prince of botany" and one of the most brilliant scientists that has ever lived:

> Words cannot express the joy that the sun brings to all living things. Now the blackcock and the capercailzie begin to frolic, the fish to sport. Every animal feels the sexual urge. Yes, Love comes even to the plants. Males and females, even the hermaphrodites, hold their nuptials...showing by their sexual organs which are males, which females, which hermaphrodite.... The actual petals of a flower contribute nothing to generation, serving as a bridal bed which the great Creator has so gloriously prepared, adorned with such precious bed curtains, and perfumed with so many sweet scents in order that the bridegroom and bride may therein celebrate their nuptials with the greater solemnity. When the bed has thus been made ready, then it is the time for the bridegroom to embrace his beloved bride and surrender himself to her.... (Blunt, 2001 p.33)

Language, said Linnaeus, should adorn science, and here he combines love and pedagogy and illustrates "a learned piety and a pious learning" of the civilised life to which the Erasmists aspired (Olin, 1987). This pedagogy was, for the humanist, the only legitimate way to change the direction of society and develop the community. For them, a civilised community was an educated and compassionate community. This required giving access to education to all citizens. Therefore, in the Netherlands, teachers of Reformed schools were required to provide free education to children from poor households, which explains the high level of Dutch literacy when compared with the rest of Europe (Israel, 1995). In England, Thomas More, Erasmus and Juan Luis Vives founded Saint Paul (Phau, 1995) school especially for children from poor families. Also during his stay in England, Juan Luis Vives wrote the first manual for the education of the woman (2000).

The humanists added to pedagogy a social structure modelled on the family. Not only was the family the basic unit of society, but following the teachings of Jesus, they considered the totality of the community like a family where all were members, from the humblest to the most noble. This was a family socialism or a "social humanism" (Hurtado, 1992) that dismissed all social rank or caste; the hierarchy was exclusively formed by age tiers corresponding to children, parents and grandparents based on respect for wisdom and experience. Each tier was being educated to assume the responsibility of the next tier. Family love is spread through all institutions; orphanages and old peoples' homes were managed not by executives, but by a *House-father* and a *House-*m*other*[7]. Science also reflected the solidarity of family, like Rembrandt in his first masterpiece: *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulp* (Figure 3). The central place in the canvas is occupied by the body Adriaan Adriaans, who had been executed for his crime the day of the autopsy. Rembrandt causes the light to drop on his body, to communicate to us that despite his crime, this body is God's work[8]. There is a line that starts in the body and spreads out towards the face of the students who observe, with awe, the muscles of the arm exposed by Dr. Tulp. Thus Rembrandt shows with his brush the wonder that Linnaeus found impossible to express with words.

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Figure 3 ABOUT HERE

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A second line also starts from the body but now heads towards Dr. Tulp's hat. The Doctor is the only one who has his hat on, something that is typical of this period in the Netherlands. Foreigners visiting the Netherlands in the seventeenth century were surprised that Dutch men kept their hats on all the time, even in church and when sitting down to dinner (van de

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[7] In Dutch: binnenvader and binnenmoeder.
[8] Rembrandt creates a similar effect in his painting *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* (1644) National Gallery, London.

Wetering, 2005). The hat was for them a symbol of freedom and they kept it on not as a gesture of superiority or arrogance but on the contrary, as an indication of humility. By keeping their hat on they declared that Christ had freed them morally and politically. With this second line, Rembrandt connects Adriaans' death with the death of Jesus making it the line of human brotherhood. Although Dr. Tulp was a famous doctor and held important civic positions, he shared the same human nature with Adriaans, and thus Rembrandt painted him with his hat on, with a more sober-coloured suit and with a more modestly embroidered collar than his students. This is not just true in the painting, in real life Dr. Tulp was a very modest man devoted to his patients and compassionate and regarded as "a true physician who was aware of his responsibility in dealing with mental troubles as well as bodily ills". (Goldwyn, 1961 p. 274)

There is a marked difference between Rembrandt and the painting of the same subject produced a century later by Cornelis Troost (Figure 4). This art work belongs to the transition period that takes us from humanism to modernism and that is – when we carefully examine it – ironically called "Enlightenment" (Kant, 1996). Judging by the lack of interest in the faces of the students, the enlightened anatomy class does not generate wonder in its students. On the contrary, the somewhat precarious position of the cadaver shows a measure of disdain. The characters are dressed like French aristocrats with their powdered wig affecting wealth and power. We are now at a time when compassion and human conscience are being replaced with rationalism and materialism.

Figure 4 About Here

As one would expect, in the absence of love and education to transform society, people have no other resort than to grovel for power and violence as the only route out of poverty and achieve "freedom, equality and fraternity." Thus the French Revolution marks the beginning of modernity with power as the primary method for social change. In a giant painting, Jacques-Louis David portrays the tyrant Napoleon crowning his wife Josephine after having crowned himself emperor (Figure 5). It is not a charitable Doctor Tulp with his black hat, but it is a new Domitian who proclaims himself Dominus et Deus (Lord and God) in order to modernise Europe, not with compassion and pedagogy, but with power and violence. From now on, it is the ambition for power that reigns in ideology, politics, science and all human endeavour. Even the contemporary Josephine, having discovered that power has replaced love and pedagogy, casts her empress crown away and covets the emperor's crown.

Figure 5 About Here

But power not only replaces the humanist pedagogical love, it also attempts to discredit it. Militarism, the main tool to convert communities into empires, despises compassion as a sign of weakness. This contempt, according to Blasco Ibañez, was expressed in the First World War as a:

> … blasphemies against humanity, against justice, against all that makes life sweet and bearable. "Might is superior to Right!" . . . "The weak should not exist.". . . "Be harsh in order to be great." [and] "...Kultur is the spiritual organization of the world, it does not exclude bloody savagery when that becomes necessary. Kultur sanctifies the demon within us, and is above morality, reason and science. We are going to impose Kultur by force of the cannon." (2008)

These "blasphemies" are not things of the past, they are still part of the politics of nations, even those that are considered democratic are not mortified by getting rid of "everything that makes life tolerable and sweet." According to Donald Rumsfeld, "[t]oday, it should be clear

that not only is weakness provocative...but the perception of weakness on our part can be provocative as well...” and "...[f]reedom's untidy, and free people are free to make mistakes and commit crimes and do bad things" ... "Stuff happens..." (Rutenberg, 2006; Loughlin, 2003).

There are other ways of exercising violence and of discrediting humanism and although they may not physically hurt, they can inflict deep psychological damage. Socio-economic coercion may be applied in a very sophisticated and effective manner to subdue people. Huntford (1971) tells how the Swedish Social Democratic Party used totalitarianism based on socio-economic blackmail to achieve desired social changes. Through this method, it subordinated the Swedish people with the same effectiveness of the Soviet Union, but without the physical brutality. Thus it mastered all Swedish institutions. This socio-economic violence discredits the humanist ethic not only by regarding it as weakness, but by considering it impracticable and by threatening people with alienation. However, this type of control is not only an instrument of state socialism. Capitalism has also dismissed love, arguing that utilitarianism and egoism, when guided by the invisible hand of greed, generate more social benefit than what can be achieved by altruism (Smith, 1970). Von Bertalanffy himself, the father of general systems theory held that "[u]nfortunately we do not live in a world where the maxim *Love thy neighbour as thyself* is practicable." (von Bertalanffy & La Violette, 1981 p. 24)

Finally, the humanities have been cast away by subjectivity, the father of which is Kant. Kantian doctrine, which assures us that reality is a projection of our thinking, is very seductive, for it robs science of its conscience and gives us license to do whatever we please. What a charming philosophy, it allows us to pretend that all are saints when in fact we are all sinners! Subjectivism has left its legacy in soft systems methodology. This approach, which today is the most popular, was designed for executives who must address issues that were considered tangled and unclear ("fuzzy")[9]. In regarding them as fuzzy, it ignored the profound erudition of the humanities and their incisiveness to discern the problems of society and culture. With great convenience for business executives, subjective systems approaches have cast an epistemological cloud over the human suffering and desolation that surrounds today's capitalist corporations. It is an open invitation to turn a blind eye and continue with the slogan "les affaires sont les affaires." Let us not forget how Rumsfeld emphatically declared that freedom is messy and that crime and bad things just happen. How does soft systems methodology respond to Rumsfeld's "rich picture"?

Moreover, removing the humanities from the reach of the people and the students, is to abandon them to individualism, and help commerce to turn them into “infantilized adults” Barber (2007) living in an "idiot culture" Bernstein (1992). It is like impeding wolves to hunt in packs and force each to fend on its own, declaring them "free wolves." Subjectivism leaves people, especially the young, confused and helpless, ready to be considered as human material for the use of capitalism. We should not be surprised, therefore, that there has been no resistance to the introduction of the concept *Human Resources* into management, a notion consonant with Nazism and Stalinism and which originates from de La Mettrie's notion of man:

> Let us then conclude boldly that man is a machine, and that in the whole universe there is but a single substance differently modified. (1995)

Captivated by economies of scale and greed to dominate the market, executives have promoted the growth of the metropolis as a gigantic human factory and supermarket of human resources at one end and consumers on the other. Hence, we have a continuously growing number of cities passing the ten million inhabitants mark. To satisfy the cities' insatiable appetite for humanity, rural and remote regions have had to sacrifice their populations. Most who emigrate from them are young and with talents that rural communities desperately need to

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[9] Checkland (1999). A detailed critique of the subjective systems methodology is found in Flood & Ulrich (1990).

retain in order to stabilise and develop (de Raadt & de Raadt; 2004). True, the metropolis offers privileges that rural areas cannot provide, but these benefits are accessible only to a small proportion of the population. Most do not have access to these privileges and reside in the metropolis because it is the only way for them to survive. But there is another argument against the expansion of the metropolis. As we have maintained, human beings are social beings who need a community to realise themselves. Moreover, this community must have a systemically appropriate structure and size to allow civic engagement. The structure and size of a metropolis prevents their citizens from exercising their rights and assuming their civic and democratic responsibilities. Therefore, the metropolis is not a community and its inhabitants will never be citizens but only a mass of men and women (Ortega y Gasset, 1995).

5 Towards a New Systemic and Humanist Transition

We have reached a point where we must move from critical thinking to creative thinking and ask ourselves: What should we do now? To restore the equilibrium in a fragmented community we must do three things simultaneously: (1) share the knowledge of the humanities and free people from ignorance, (2) reintegrate the community and (3) turn knowledge into work, for "life is a task" Ortega y Gasset (1987). This task cannot be done through the bureaucracy, because this is mostly a redundancy that wastes lives and resources and yields almost nothing in return. Nor can we rely purely on politics, for its goal is to exercise justice and not to dictate to people how they should live. We must adopt the humanist path of pedagogy and educate a new generation willing to work with sacrifice in the start-up stage of history shown in Figure 2. My wife and I have devoted much of our lives to this work. With the help of our colleagues, we devised a multi-modal approach to restore the humanities into general systems theory. We have also developed qualitative methods to integrate methodology with method – ideas with action – in research[10]. Here, I wish to conclude by giving a brief account of our educational venture. Our work began to take concrete shape during our years in Norrbotten (in the north of Sweden). All the factors of social disequilibrium I mentioned above were present in this very remote region, yet the educational programmes were mainly oriented towards industry in the metropolitan centres of Sweden and the rest of Europe. They were programmes that belonged to the mature stage of social change (Figure 2) and as a result, most of the students, after graduation, left the region in search of the good life in the major cities.

Therefore, we established a graduate degree programme and endeavoured to turn our department into an *universitas scholarium*, a community of students. To generate this sense of community, we sought to create a family atmosphere and to integrate ourselves to the community outside the campus. We established a connection with a local village where the leadership was sympathetic to our project in order to realise Tolstoy's scientific vision:

> Science is entirely arranged for the wealthy classes ... The service of the people by science and art will only be performed when people, dwelling in the midst of the common folk, and, like the common folk, putting forward no demands, claiming no rights, shall offer to the common folk their scientific and artistic services; the acceptance or rejection of which shall depend wholly on the will of the common folk. (2003)

We considered it important that both teachers and students should integrate with the people, not to agitate them politically, but to know their troubles and share our knowledge for their resolution. In our visits to this village, where we stayed for a day or two, the students collected data and interviewed families and leaders. We also invited the local press to write articles to encourage our students and show that their interest in the community was appreciated. The students built analytical models to identify the critical factors affecting the community and designed activities to help stabilise it. For our purpose was not just to pass on

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[10] This includes a free open-source computer package, SmCube, to model communities (de Raadt, 2001)

knowledge, but also to turn this knowledge into work, real work for the benefit of the
community.

During the years I worked at universities, I observed that a large proportion of the budget
was absorbed by the administration (Cain and Hewett, 2004) and this increased year after year.
At the same time, the contribution of the administration to the advancement of science and the
quality of the education was minimal. Moreover, university autonomy and academic freedom
had disappeared, since the direction of the university was dictated by government bureaucrats
and implemented by their counterparts within the university administration. Since most
bureaucrats have proven to know little about science and education but much about
bureaucracy, the university was becoming a metro-university with commercial interests but of
mediocre intellectual quality. On the other hand, the cost of information and communication
technology was decreasing while its potential increased. The Internet, the digitisation of
literature, the emergence of open source software like Linux and Ubuntu, eliminated the need
for centralisation of the university. A new opportunity opened for us to become independent of
the metropolitan university and create a true *universitas* (academic community) made up of
small academic groups located in regional communities. The Internet allowed us to form an
academic federation to share knowledge and provide an independent peer review similar to
that adopted by scientific journals and thus help improve the quality of our work. Such
collegiality made it also possible for community to combine localised education with distance
education and expand opportunities for students. Thus we formed a centre – Melbourne
Centre for Community Development - that offers a master's degree in community development
and carries out research integrated with teaching. The centre resides in Melbourne in name
only, because students are in various locations and teaching is done through the Internet from
our home in Batemans Bay on the south-east coast of Australia. The centre is affiliated with
two academic institutions, one of which awards the degree to students and, outside the normal
academic regulations, the centre operates with ample scientific autonomy.

There has always been great difficulty in establishing systems programmes in the university.
Programs are started with the same speed that they are discontinued, and this instability has
prevented the systemic sciences from reaching their intellectual maturity. Part of this is due to
the fragmentation of traditional science that is imposed on the structure of the university and
prevents the systems science from finding a permanent home in the faculty structure. Part is
also due to systems science being unable to generate the level of profits attained by other
programmes that are incorporated into the university for their commercial value rather than
their scientific and humanitarian merit. But now technology offers us a historic opportunity to
create a federated system integrated into the community. I have watched with great interest the
extensive systemic activity in Latin America and it seems likely that this is where the most
fertile ground for this vision lies. Perhaps the time has come to be in Latin America where such
systemic initiative will emerge and lead us to remark: "Here are those who speak as they live,
and live as they speak." (Vives, 1971 p. 287)

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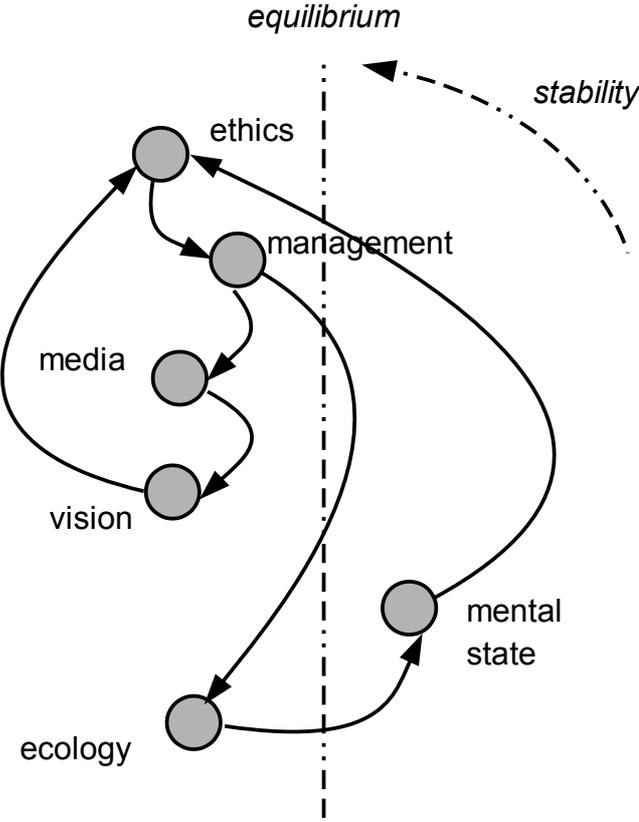von Bertalanffy, Ludwig and LaViolette, Paul A. (ed.) (1981) A Systems View of Man. Boulder, Colorado, Praeger.

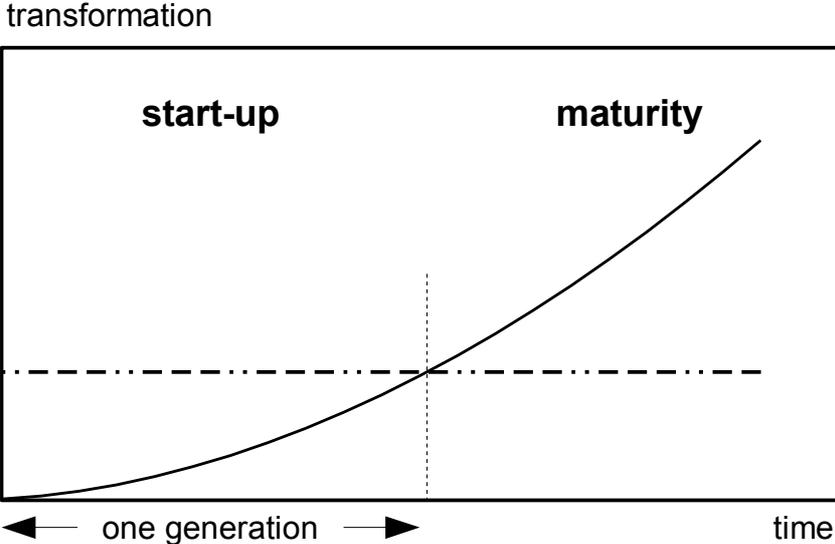Figure 1: Disequilibrium

transformation

Figure 2: Social Transformation

Figure 3: *The Anatomy Lecture of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp*
Rembrandt, Harmenszoon van Rijn (1632) The Hague, Mauritshuis

Figure 4: *Anatomy Lesson of Dr Willem Röell*
Troost, Cornelis (1728) Amsterdam Museum

Figure 5: *Consecration of the Emperor Napoleon I* (detail)
 David, Jacques-Louis (1805-1807) Paris, Louvre Museum