

CATALYSING THE NEW RENAISSANCE

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23 May 2016

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¹ Markus Molz will co-author this paper. So far it is a draft.

FOREWORD

The *University for the Future Initiative* is a voluntary association of likeminded individuals, groups and organizations seeking to induce changes in three interlinked spheres of society: cultural life, economic life and political life. We do not have a comprehensive solution how to change these spheres, but we identified three key domains that act as leverage points for societal development. These domains are:

- education (Education for the Future, E4F),
- communities (Communities for the Future, C4F) and
- organisations (Organisations for the Future, O4F).

We believe that transformative changes in these domains will have effects on the larger spheres of politics, economics and culture. This is why we started to do lay the groundwork for rethinking education, communities and organisations. The University for the Future Initiative brings together teachers, researchers, students, philosophers, artists, activists, consultants, visionary entrepreneurs and others in an effort to co-create and implement sustainable solutions.

Our core concern is education, which is also at the heart of transformative change in communities and organisations. The *University for the Future Initiative* therefore seeks to lay the ground for a new kind of education, an education that helps catalyse the New Renaissance. Such an education addresses the Grand Challenges of our era and focuses on desirable futures. The goal of the Initiative is not just to seek better educational results per se, but to improve the contribution of education to society. We need educated people ready to dedicate their lives to a better future not just for themselves but for others. To make such a contribution, we need a vision for society. We need to understand the forces that are shaping society in the 21st century: the dystopian trends, their causes, as well as the possibilities for renewal.

This document reflects the Society for the Future vision of the University for the Future Initiative.² It is the first output resulting from a new Research Initiative, which carries the same name as this paper, namely “Catalysing the New Renaissance”. This Initiative seeks to identify past and present cases (including emerging cases) where individuals, groups, organisations and communities work on concrete projects, programmes, initiatives and institutions oriented toward catalysing the New Renaissance. The Research Initiative is designed in a way that it becomes a catalyst itself. It is a research, training, development and action programme – all in one.³

This Research Initiative does not add to the literature focusing on theoretical exploration of Grand Challenges or empirical exploration of small challenges. It pursues a holistic approach that includes the following elements:

- 1) descriptive work on **what is**, dealing with the symptoms of dystopia, existing and emerging next practices, etc.
- 2) analytical work on **why it is the way it is**, focusing on causes
- 3) prognostic work on **what is likely to happen**, presenting an outlook on likely futures
- 4) normative work on **what could be**, developing possible solutions for preferred futures
- 5) instrumental work on **what are the pathways**, exploring conduits to implement these next paradigms
- 6) practical work in the “real world”, implementing the normative and instrumental work.

We believe that it is best to think through aspects #1-5 before going into #6 (practical work). The relationship between visionary and design work (#1-5) and practical work (#6) is described in Section “How to get started” on p. 42ff.

² For information about the Society for the Future vision, see www.4future.site/society; for more information on the University for the Future Initiative www.4future.site/university.

³ More information on the Research Initiative can be found at www4future.site/xxxx.

INTRODUCTION

After rising from the ashes of the Second World War, many industrialized countries experienced an epoch of unprecedented economic prosperity and political stability. But instead of preparing the future, the predominant mode was to live as if there was no tomorrow. Individuals, firms and nations borrowed with abandon, not realizing how excess spending and debt gradually destabilised the fundamentals of future well-being. Overconsumption, lack of ecological stewardship, corruption, unmanageable bureaucratic systems, flawed education systems, and a widespread cultural malaise have taken their toll. Small fissures in the economic, political, cultural and ecological fabric widened to cracks; cracks broadened to crevices; and crevices are becoming tectonic faults, causing friction and unleashing forces that are increasingly difficult to contain.

Over the same period, there have been first signs of an emerging Renaissance. New initiatives in civil society, business and the public sector have sprung up. Many people work on ideas and practices that contribute to a regeneration and renewal of society. Currently, there are many actual and potential change-makers and innovators interested, or already active, in generating positive social and environmental impact. These so-called “cultural creatives” (Ray & Anderson 2000) are best described with reference to their worldviews and value orientation.

Cultural creatives have always been a small minority, but according to value surveys, there has been a shift in orientation among the population as a whole, especially among the young generation. In a study of changing values among Western publics from 1970 to 2006, Ronald Inglehart stated that: “A massive body of evidence demonstrates that an intergenerational shift from materialist to post-materialist priorities has been occurring” (2008: 131). Post-materialist values correlate with high intrinsic motivation for civic engagement (Welzel 2010). In recent years, largely below the radar of public visibility, people who identify with post-materialist values have started to become the majority of the population in a number of Western countries (Inglehart 2008). This manifests in terms of increased concern about issues such as education, quality of life, nutrition, ecology, gender equality, animal rights, clean energy, self-sufficiency and the well-being of future generations.

For many people, the fundamental goals of individuals, families, communities and nations are coming to the fore. They start asking timeless questions such as: What do we live for? How can improve relationships? How can we build healthy communities? What is a good society?

One starting point for change is a revision of values and worldviews, which contributed to the symptoms of dystopia we are witnessing locally, regionally, nationally and globally. Often, these values and worldviews originate from materialism. Increasingly we also witness a spread of various kinds of fundamentalism (including political, scientific and religious fundamentalism), postmodern cynicism as well as nihilism. These approaches differ from materialism, but in terms of their effect on the world they are “brothers in spirit” working for the same goal: the undermining of the human being as a “freedom being”⁴ and the hindering of societal development that could enable human beings to live up to their purpose.

A revision of values and worldviews is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for the whole society transformation needed during the 21st century. New values and worldviews do not automatically bring physical, psychological or spiritual health. Nor will they create a new society. If a shift of values and worldviews was the critical factor, we would be already well on our way toward a New Renaissance.

⁴ We borrow the term “freedom being” from a citation attributed to Joseph Beuys: “Everyone is an artist, a freedom being, called to participate in transforming and reshaping the conditions, thinking and structures that shape and inform our lives” (source?).

Thus, we need to ask: is there something we overlook when we call for new values and worldviews – or for new ethics, new thinking, a new politics, etc.? In our view, there is a factor that is even more important, more underlying and more fundamental.

This factor is *consciousness*.

In what follows, we examine four key questions:

- 1) What do we mean by “New Renaissance”, “consciousness” and “Dystopia”?
- 2) What are the symptoms of crisis in the early 21st century (the dystopian trends)?
- 3) What are the causes of these dystopian trends (immediate, intermediate and root causes)?
- 4) What are possible solutions (immediate, intermediate and root solutions)?

The paper ends with an outlook and a conclusion.

1. TERMINOLOGY

New Renaissance

In 2009, the European Research Area Board called for “a ‘new Renaissance’, a paradigm shift in what the role and place of science should be”, adding that “a new, holistic way of thinking is required as technological answers alone are not the end-solution to a given problem. ... As we move towards nine billion people on one planet, many of our familiar patterns of society will have to change. Too many people will have to share too few resources. ... Growing problems — of climate change, healthcare, sustainability — must be solved. The impact of globalisation on our livelihoods and on the quality of our lives will deepen.” (ERAB 2009, pp. 1-2). According to the European Research Area Board, “we will need to harness our talent much better to solve the Grand Challenges of our age, in concert with researchers around the globe” (pp. 8-9).

The “New Renaissance” terminology is not the only term that refers to the epochal change we are experiencing. Other terms include Great Transformation, Great Disruption, Great Turning, Great Transition, Long Emergency, Polycrisis, Big Shift, Macroshift, etc. All these terms refer to an ongoing society-wide transformation – a transformation of all sectors and dimensions of human existence. While some terms emphasize crisis (e.g. Long Emergency, Polycrisis, Great Disruption), others are neutral (e.g. Macroshift, Big Shift, Great Transformation, Great Turning).

The term New Renaissance, in contrast, has a positive meaning, explicitly and deliberately. It refers to a transformation that leads to a more sustainable, just and caring society; a society that is capable of protecting human rights as well as animal rights; a society that values cultural heritage and folk wisdom; a society that cherishes art and craftsmanship; a society that overcomes the adulation of economic growth, that extracts from nature only what can be replenished, and takes proactive steps to restore the pristine beauty of our planet.

From a historical perspective, we know that visions for society can degenerate into ideologies. Witness for instance Communism, Muammar Ghaddafi’s green book or Kim Jong Il’s philosophy of self-reliance. Sometimes, these visions have been implemented in different ways than originally intended. Sometimes, their included design flaws, which created unforeseen damages. And sometimes the visions were, if you will pardon the expression, plain mad. In light of this historical experience, we have two options:

First, we can stop thinking of how society should evolve, which means letting the currently prevalent ways of thinking evolve society. The consequences we describe below in the section on Dystopia (p. 8ff).

The choice not to think things through, and not to act, supports and strengthens the existing trajectories, which creates co-responsibility among those choosing not to think, or not to act.

Second, we can try to co-develop a future vision, which is designed from its fundament to uphold freedom. It needs to ensure that people are free, that there will be no suppression of dissidents, that there is diversity, that there will be no special position for one group over another, that it is an alive and evolving endeavour instead of an ideology that is imposed from above, that it is not a dogma that people have to believe in.

If freedom is at the heart of the endeavour, one can still not avoid that someone misunderstands the impulse, making an ideology from it. But one can minimize the risk that efforts to create a better future degenerate into a road to slavery.

New Renaissance work is the opposite of social engineering. It is about building *social capital*. It is participative and co-creative. It is a bottom up development, emphasizing relationships, collaboration, dialogue, trust and participation. It is a vision of deep democracy.

The New Renaissance impulse is about bringing inner and outer work together: it is not only about personal development work, but also about work to change the world we are living in. Advocacy of social change goes hand in hand with work on character. Key qualities include the ability to be self-critical and the will to improve one's vision based on experience and critique.

The core idea of the New Renaissance is the free development of individuals. If freedom is lost, it is a sign that the work is not carried out in a New Renaissance spirit. The freedom-impulse expresses itself in all areas of life. For instance, it fosters soulful ways of bringing up children so as to protect their free spirit; it advocates an education system based on freedom; it builds freedom in relationships; it creates communities of freedom; it empowers people to follow their dreams rather than being subject to expectations or pressures from the social environment; it promotes new approaches to health and healing based on free will; it develops non-authoritarian forms of leadership and governance; it avoids manipulation and homogenization (*Gleichschaltung*). These and many other aspects of the New Renaissance are already in the hearts and minds of people who are working on aspects of the whole, often without knowing about each other.

The New Renaissance is a drive toward higher human values and potential, fostered and expressed in all professions and all sectors of society. A primary concern is people's development towards their deeper vocation and higher potential. When one considers that the vast majority of people do not even know their life's work, not to speak of their higher potential, one understands the significance and potential impact of the New Renaissance.

At the broadest level, the New Renaissance represents the ideal of a society that works for all – a society that is more just and more democratic even compared with countries that occupy the top ranks of surveys on quality of life, transparency and democracy.

The New Renaissance is not postmodern, but transmodern. It values the contribution of deconstruction, but its primary accent is on reconstruction. A key goal is to mend the fabric of social relations. This includes relations that have been fractured and torn in modern societies: the self, families, organisations, communities, nations, intercultural relations across cultures and nations.

The New Renaissance learns lessons from previous periods of renaissance, but it is not an effort to bring back old times. The term "new" in "New Renaissance" means that the New Renaissance brings ideas from the future into the present. It is about developing new ideas, new practices, new models, new institutions and new systems in all spheres of society

The New Renaissance includes possibilities of building on past ideas and practices. It relates and reconnects to ancient philosophies, mythologies, wisdom traditions and spiritualities that have enriched the cultural heritage of humanity. It also enables re-combining, re-labelling, or re-interpreting what exists. However, its most distinctive feature is future creation. New Renaissance thinking appreciates the past without being bound to it. Its qualities come from the realm of the not yet expressed, not yet manifested, not yet empirical, not yet provable or falsifiable. Future solutions do not necessarily have to be similar to today's solutions. Demands like "show us a model where it works" do not do justice to the New Renaissance approach. When current solutions do not work, it is worth trying new approaches that have never been tried before.

The New Renaissance has a chance to develop true alternatives to the ways that have brought us to where we are today. Much work still needs to be done to bring these ideas to a state, in which they can provide a true alternative. There is a need for spaces of "future creation" — future-oriented work in businesses, future creation in civil society organisations, future hubs at universities, Learning Villages, Learning Cities, etc.

Another way of explaining the New Renaissance is to say what it is not:

- The New Renaissance is not a Western concept. It is relevant for all countries and all cultures, because it relies on culturally contextualized, locally grown, bottom-up, emerging, participative developments.
- The New Renaissance is not a fixed blueprint. It constantly evolves and its co-developers are committed to improve their ideas and practices.
- The New Renaissance is not fixed on terminology. There is a rich and proliferating literature relating to the New Renaissance without using that term. In fact, readers interested in the New Renaissance will not get useful results by googling this term. Instead, they might look up other key words as well as key authors mentioned in this paper.⁵
- The New Renaissance is not whatever goes under that name. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea uses the term "democracy", but it is one of the most autocratic regimes in the world. In a similar way, we need to be discerning when someone uses the term New Renaissance.
- The New Renaissance is not a dream, prophesy or utopia. It is deeply connected to reality, i.e. to history, to the earth, to the cosmos, and to all beings.
- The New Renaissance may inspire political parties and movements, but itself it is not a political initiative searching for institutionalisation.
- The New Renaissance is not the same as Futures Studies. It focuses on the entire chain from wisdom to vision to action. It includes practical work, prototyping and manifestation.
- The New Renaissance approach is not a techno-futuristic vision leading humanity further toward engineered, artificial and virtual worlds.

At a general level, the New Renaissance can be approximated by words such as regeneration, renewal, innovation, rejuvenation, refinement. These words carry an inherent risk of being flattened and emptied of meaning. Consider, for instance, what happened to "love", "truth" or "God". These words have been so often misused that they ring hollow when they are not properly framed.

The New Renaissance terminology runs the same risk. If we wish the term to stand for something, it is important to begin elaborating what it means. We need short, medium and long descriptions that provide ever more detailed contours for those who wish to get a fuller picture. In light of the fact that

⁵ An annotated bibliography would be most useful, but does not exist yet.

the New Renaissance is a relatively new and uncharted concept, it can be given a meaning that can hopefully stand the test of time.

Synthesizing what we said above, we propose the following working definition:

The New Renaissance of the 21st century is an epochal cultural renewal that is currently in its beginnings and that is facing the contemporary Grand Challenges such as climate change, nuclear proliferation, wars, poverty and mass migration. The New Renaissance has the potential to transform and regenerate all domains of life in the coming decades and stimulate the unfolding of a new type of society, a Society for the Future. This is a society that works for all, that is just, free, inclusive and sustainable, and that cares for each person's unique development towards deeper vocation and higher potential. The New Renaissance can be catalysed by redesigning education, by transforming organisations and by regenerating communities, in new systemic ways. The primary source of the New Renaissance is introspection and personal development leading to consciousness. Deep democracy is at the core of the New Renaissance impulse.

Consciousness

In a lecture on war in 1838, Ralph Waldo Emerson pointed to the relation between inner and outer phenomena:

“Every nation and every man instantly surround themselves with a material apparatus which exactly corresponds to their moral state, or their state of thought. Observe how every truth and every error, each a thought of some man's mind, clothes itself with societies, houses, cities, language, ceremonies, newspapers. Observe the ideas of the present day...see how each of these abstractions has embodied itself in an imposing apparatus in the community, and how timber, brick, lime, and stone have flown into convenient shape, obedient to the master idea reigning in the minds of many persons... It follows, of course, that the least change in the man will change his circumstances; the least enlargement of ideas, the least mitigation of his feelings in respect to other men...would cause the most striking changes of external things.” (1887, 177).

The New Renaissance is much more than a shift in values and worldviews. It is a change in consciousness. People can support certain values, but if their consciousness does not embrace them, values remain theoretical constructs. The mind easily grasps concepts without living them in practice. This is why there are gaps between aspirations and the choices made in everyday life; why it is so difficult to change lifestyles; and why many organisations, communities and societies are dysfunctional despite fundamental goodness inside people.

Even if one could achieve a state in which one's values are noble, and one's worldview adequate, this would not ensure that one is healthy, nor that one is able to engage with the world in productive ways. It is possible to be knowledgeable about inner and outer dimensions, or to be advanced on some aspects of personal development. This is not the same as being conscious. Witness biographies of spiritual leaders, which sometimes reveal the most astonishing lapses.

In the same way as higher level mathematics cannot be understood by non-mathematicians, the concept of consciousness cannot be understood without actually having experience of it. It would be futile trying to explain consciousness exclusively with the tools of science. Science can detect aspects of it, but it cannot capture the whole in all its vastness. A way to find out about consciousness is to discover it

experientially in oneself, step by step. As a starting point, there can be an intuitive understanding – a sense that there must be something beyond ordinary thinking, feeling and willing. From there, it is possible to discover further aspects if one is attentive and open.

Consciousness holds thinking, feeling and willing together. It constitutes our highest identity. The current era is marked by a crisis of identity, a confusion about who we truly are. The crisis of values, which many people believe is the primary cause for our modern ills, is a consequence of not knowing our true nature.

Developing active self-knowledge and an unfolding understanding of the mystery we call human life is not something we can study in a classroom; it is not a belief either. It is an intensely personal exploration. In this process, it is more important to get in touch with one's own self than to judge others. This is not to say one should be blind to the faults of others, but it can hinder one's own development if too much attention is given to the consciousness of others. The rise of consciousness goes along with love, empathy and forgiveness, which reduces judgment of others.

It is useful to distinguish “consciousness” from ordinary understandings. For instance, people who are not asleep (or not in a coma) are *alert*, but not necessarily conscious. People who know about their mistakes are *aware*, but not inevitably conscious. Likewise, people who feel bad about harm they cause on others have a *conscience*, yet conscience is not the same as consciousness.

Furthermore, the term consciousness should not be confused with intelligence. Intelligence can help bring forth consciousness, but it can also be an obstacle. It depends how on the *qualities* of the intelligence, how it is oriented and used, and whether it goes beyond mental intelligence to include heart-intelligence and will-intelligence. Consciousness does not change our intelligence profile, making us suddenly smart in, say, mathematics or foreign languages. Rather, it helps enliven human intelligence, making it open to wisdom, infusing it with love, and putting it in service to humanity.

We attempt the following working definition of consciousness, with the caution that any definition of mysteries is a risky undertaking, creating reduced and misleading perceptions:

Consciousness is a higher level alertness, awareness, conscience and will. It is the better part in ourselves, something one may call the Higher Self. It is part of ourselves but at the same time transcends ourselves. There is a sublime being in humans – a part in us that enables us to develop. This conscious being prevents a person from making mistakes. It knows where we come from and where we are going. It governs our thinking, feeling and willing. It ensures that knowing leads to doing. It refines our values and worldviews. It is the humanity inside humans. It can lead to enlightenment in individuals as well as in society. When enlightenment happens as a collective state, as collective consciousness⁶, we speak of a period of renaissance. Humanity has a chance of moving toward such a state, despite (and because of) all its troubles.

The following quote by Albert Einstein expresses a key characteristic of consciousness – the move beyond selfishness:

A human being is a part of the whole, called by us "Universe," a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated

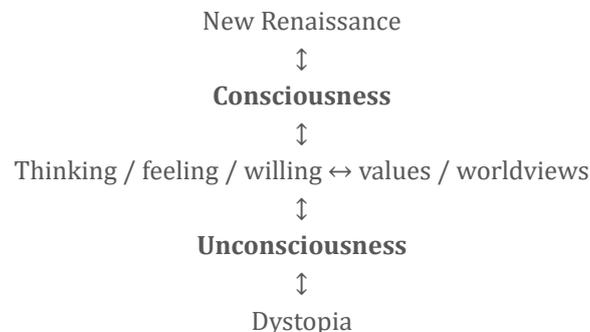
⁶ The term collective consciousness needs to be distinguished from the term “collective unconscious” of Carl Jung. The “collective unconscious” is a realm of mythical archetypes and other motives from the history of mankind; whereas “collective consciousness” refers to a process of awakening at transpersonal level. The precise relationship between the two phenomena would make an interesting field of study.

from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. Nobody is able to achieve this completely, but the striving for such achievement is in itself a part of the liberation and a foundation for inner security.

From this understanding it follows that consciousness is not a self-centred type of personal development; it is a type of personal development that is socially engaged in widening circles of compassion. Consciousness is about taking responsibility for oneself, but also for others. It is not only about self-improvement, but also about improvement of the world. It does so without manipulating, proselytizing and imposing. Consciousness does not blend well with ego, self-promotion or pretence. Its qualities include kindness, empathy and the respect of other people's free will.

Dystopia

The New Renaissance is a scenario of breakthrough; Dystopia is a scenario of breakdown. The following illustration shows the causal relationships:



All elements contained in this illustration influence each other. For instance, materialistic values or worldviews influence people's thinking, feeling and willing. The other way around, dysfunctions in thinking, feeling and willing may bring forth materialistic values and worldviews, preventing consciousness from arising. The other way around, the lack of consciousness produces negative thoughts and feelings like sadness, grief, non-forgiveness, hate, blame, etc.

The opposite of consciousness is, logically, unconsciousness. Human history is marked by near universal unconsciousness. As far as we can look back, we notice a dysfunction in human beings, a part of us which can, and does, cause harm. This dysfunction may be the meaning of the word "original sin". This is why, for millennia, the world's wisdom traditions have focused on helping human beings overcome their dysfunction and move toward higher states of consciousness.

The prevalence of unconsciousness has brought humanity to sheer unimaginable atrocities and disaster. In the 20th century, there were two world wars, the arms race, the deadly legacy of nuclear testing and the threat of nuclear war. In the 21st century, there are numerous regional conflicts, a looming clash of civilisations, a decline of culture, and widespread institutional degeneration. The political and economic systems are in overdrive, forcing people to accelerate and exhausting them. Enormous sums of money are invested in the military-industrial complex, which continues to develop ever more insidious weapons. Military planners are preparing for cyberwars, robot wars and nuclear wars. The urgency to change in fundamental ways is increasing.

State and supranational structures are not well prepared to deal with dystopian trends such as ecocide, rising inequality, financial crisis, terrorism, wars and the unpredictable consequences of mass migration. Part of the problem is corruption. Some states are under the control of mafia clans and drug lords. Others are governed by elites that are less violent, but no less skilful in lining their pockets. It is hard to say if there are any states left that do not experience state capture through oligarchs and lobby groups. Multilateral structures, like the EU and the United Nations, are to a large extent captured as well. New York and Brussels are brimming with lobbyists representing partial interests instead of the common good. As a result, it is no longer clear whether power is enacted through the government or the private sector, because there is a corridor between them. People switch from one side to the other, erasing the distinction between public service and private sector profit. Moves to counter these practices have been blocked. Anti-corruption cases are rarely successful and there are no strong protections for whistleblowers. Instead of being rewarded for uncovering wrong-doing, they face long prison sentences.

Beside corruption, another feature of our time is disorientation. The rhetoric of leaders is oriented toward crisp soundbites that fit television and Twitter. The solutions offered are often too simple to address the grand challenges we are facing. Partly it is a media issue; partly a problem of the problem solvers; and partly a problem of the audience who is not very interested in complex matters.

Future generations are expected to solve our problems, but it is hard to see how can this happen if present generations do not make a start. One thing we could do, as a start, is to redesign the education system to stimulates curiosity, creativity and higher potential (see Example 6 – Education, p. 25ff). Another useful step would be to limit the addictive technologies and stultifying media that our children are hooked upon (see Example 7 – Technology, p. 27ff). These, and many other developments, are part of the societal development we call the New Renaissance.

2. SYMPTOMS

In the following, eight areas are given to illustrate the presence, or absence, of consciousness, and the possibilities of a renaissance or dystopia. The areas are geopolitics, the economy, the financial system, energy, migration, education, technology and media. Other areas such as environment, health, relationships may be added in future revisions.

Example 1 – Geopolitics

Taking the sphere of geopolitics and the Great Powers as a first example, we may observe the following trends:

- The much touted rise of China is unlikely to persist in the absence of sweeping changes in policy and practice. Ecological strains are choking China's economic miracle. Statistics about pollution-related morbidity and mortality can no longer be denied. Work related stress and economic inequality is increasing, the financial system is overstretched, human rights are not respected, social tensions are intensifying, etc. The Chinese paradox is one of a rising economy that is producing falling happiness (Brockmann et al 2009), a predicament that is shared by a growing number of countries. Guidance for a more just and sustainable future for China may be found in the country's cultural riches and its history of wisdom. Finding the way back to ancient cultural heritage including philosophy and the arts could overcome the current orientation toward material growth, political power and military build-up. In the roots of Chinese culture lies the potential to mitigate the above mentioned ailments.
- Similarly, Russia's rich heritage could provide insights for moving toward a just and sustainable society. A starting point would be stimulation of cultural freedoms in all spheres, which would free creative resources and help forge a more diversified economy. This in turn would mitigate the economic crisis and reduce Russia's dependence on high oil and gas prices. A key priority is the improvement of sovereign finances and the redirection of government spending on productive long-term endeavours. Decisions such as the annexation of Crimea, the interventions in Eastern Ukraine and Syria, as well as ownership claims of large parts of the Arctic, point to a strategy, in which international conflict is used to justify repressive policies and the redirection of resources to internal security and the military. In the short term, this strategy may increase Russian geopolitical clout, but in the medium and long term, the allocation of scarce resources toward the military is bound to undermine Russia's well-being;
- The United States is unlikely to experience a "Golden Age" in the second half of the century, as predicted by George Friedman (2010). For this to happen, the country would need to channel much more of its creative and entrepreneurial energy to endeavours serving the public good, invest in human potential, infrastructure and the protection of natural resources. Even if the US government continues raising the debt ceiling every year, it will be difficult to maintain, let alone increase, military expenses. For decades, the US pursued an interventionist foreign policy, supporting friendly governments and overthrowing others. These interventions include full scale wars and extended combat operations in the Middle East and Afghanistan, causing strains, not only in terms of deaths, but also in terms of incidence of post-traumatic stress disorder and other illnesses among veterans. If the United States were to face additional conflicts with, say, Russia, China and/or North Korea, it would lead to overstretch. On the domestic level, fundamental policy reforms are needed to mitigate drug and media addictions, the obesity epidemic, homelessness, crime, political polarization, racism and the radicalisation of growing

parts of society. On the economic front, key development priorities include reforming campaign financing, closing the Wall Street-Washington corridor and rethinking the financial and monetary system.

In light of scarce financial resources, countries will need to prioritize spending. Priorities for a good quality of life include a health care system that creates health, an economy that serves everyone, and an education system that raises the level of education, not just test score that say little about multiple intelligence. If the Great Powers ignore this, and instead continue investing heavily in the arms race and military engagements, the required expense will undermine future well-being. If current expenditures persist, the Great Powers will become debt-laden, toothless giants advanced weaponry. They will face challenges from within and without, including potential conflicts with highly unstable countries wielding nuclear weapons, like North Korea and Pakistan, not to speak of groups such as the Taliban and the Islamic State, which specialize on asymmetric warfare that military hardware cannot effectively counter.

The economic burden of paying for military hardware is significant, but it is only part of the problem. The prime difficulty arises from the “software”. This does not refer to the software built into military technology, but the *militarism in the head, heart and will*. It includes the opinions and ways of thinking, negative sentiments, the contempt for human life, and the will to dominate, which fuel the arms race and conflicts. At the deepest level, the software reflects the state of consciousness that is the source of conflicts around the world.

The “software” is based on some of the most fundamental illusions human beings can fall for, such as the notion that entire nations are enemies; that some nations are good while others are evil; that it is normal or necessary to kill; that military prowess is a reason for national pride; that bombs can stabilize troubled regions; and so on. These ideas have failed repeatedly and spectacularly, causing enormous unnecessary suffering. Far from bringing security, military engagements, including “wars on drugs” and “wars on terrorism”, tend to fuel further conflicts by increasing hopelessness, anger and desire for revenge.⁷

More than seventy years after the Second World War, it seems that its lessons are forgotten. The politics of nationalism, domination and extermination is spreading. This starts in the homes, where children learn how to kill in video games; it continues in the company boardrooms that are operating in a Darwinian business world, as well as in the “war rooms” of government, in which unconscious impulses govern. We can observe these trends more generally in an aggressive atmosphere in society, in a divisive culture and in media environments drenched in hate.

The conflict area with the greatest global impact – and the one generating the most media attention – is the Middle East. The Arab Spring, which started with great hopes, has turned into chaos. Autocratic leaders such as Saddam Hussein, Muammar Gaddafi and Hosni Mubarak were replaced by regimes that are hardly more enlightened.

Six years after the Arab Spring, the Middle East is teetering on the brink of disaster, fuelled by a combination of authoritarianism and anarchy. In some countries, there is no functioning central

⁷ Absolute pacifism and non-action is not a solution either. History has shown that non-intervention in certain situations can also generate hopelessness, anger and desire of revenge. Witness for instance Srebrenica, Kosovo, the genocide in Rwanda, the originally peaceful protests in Syria and many other instances where international intervention was hoped for, but did not come, or it was too slow, lacking determination and focus. Overall, the assessment of conflicts and the justification for military intervention is politically, morally and humanely more complex than represented by proponents of absolute non-intervention.

authority. Competing factions occupy different regions. Many municipalities are left to their own devices, having to organise their own defence.

When we speak about the Middle East and parts of Northern Africa, we are not dealing with European-style nations but with religious and ethnic alliances, which run across nations, creating a complex regional patchwork of “tribes” struggling for power and survival. Jihadi groups, criminal gangs and tribal militias exhibiting shifting loyalties depending on the situation on the battlefield. Those who favour democracy as a form of social organisation need to ask whether democracy is possible at a time when large parts of the Middle East region and Northern Africa have become war zones. The lack of consciousness on all sides, including the international community, is mindboggling.

Foreign interventions by the Western Alliance and Russia did not help alleviate the problems in the region. A possible Muslim ‘anti-terrorism’ coalition brought together by Saudi Arabia was a prospect, but such an initiative cannot provide lasting solution in light of ethnic and religious divisions. Saudi Arabia represents one of the most extreme factions of Islam, Wahhabism, which is close to the ideology of the Islamic State. For this reason, Saudi leadership is opposed by other regional powers, including Iran, Syria, Jordan and Egypt.

The Middle East is by no means the only source for concern. Many other examples could be given for the intractable structural long-term non-awareness and non-learning, in which the world finds itself. All of them illustrate the inability or unwillingness to spell out a sustainable vision for society, to engage with problems, and to co-create systemic solutions. As for the Great Powers, there is a mismatch between economic and military resources mustered for intervention, and the lack of strategy, determination, stamina, collaboration and long-term foresight. Problem-solving efforts in foreign interventions are mostly driven by tactical concerns, including domestic considerations that have little to do with the target of intervention. The rationale of foreign interventions is often based on faulty logic and evidence, such as the claim that Saddam Hussein possessed nuclear weapons, a lie that led to hundreds of thousands of men, women and children being killed. The resulting conditions are not natural disasters, but failures attributed to human and institutional limits.

The solution cannot be found on the battlefield, but by a coming together of the world community. There need to be peace dialogues involving all parties, guided by wise diplomats. There could be also a role for spiritual leaders. The problem would be how to select them, as indicators of popularity do not correlate with evolved consciousness. Given the power-focused psychology of the actors involved, peace dialogues need to be complemented by resolutions of the Security Council whose decisions need to be backed up by force, if necessary, in order to be credible to the warring parties.

Example 2 – The Economy

Just as expenses on arms say little about security, the GDP says little about well-being. The GDP measure does not distinguish between productive and destructive events (Stiglitz, Sen & Fitoussi 2013). On paper, the growth statistics of past decades look impressive, but they do not reveal the true state of well-being of the population. They do not take into account physical and psychological health, the state of infrastructure, the quality of education, the level of trust, the rule of law, cultural and media freedom, and many other factors that are critical for current and future well-being. The GDP measure also reveals nothing about the state of nature, which is critical for long-term economic prosperity. There are examples of different approaches, such as the GNH (Gross National Happiness) in Bhutan, which uses different indicators to measure progress, putting people and “a good life” in the centre. This example has inspired similar approaches in other countries (e.g. Buen Vivir in Ecuador).

We are heading towards a population of 9 billion by 2050. The middle and upper classes in emerging markets adopt the consumption patterns prevalent in North America and Europe. This is accelerating resource extraction and environmental decline. At the same time, the number of people in abject poverty continues to rise.

The idea that economic expansion can continue relentlessly across the globe, regardless of ecological limits, is doomed to failure. Continuous growth is an impossibility theorem, because it presumes a world with boundless natural resources. It is impossible due to the limited carrying capacity of the Earth. In the short run, further economic expansion is possible, but for more than half a century, and even more so in the future, it is coupled with social and intergenerational injustice and the risk of further environmental decline. If one wants to get a glimpse of possible world futures, it is sufficient to travel for instance through Indonesia. Focused on squeezing more growth out of palm oil production, the country is giving up its greatest wealth – the rain forests, not to speak of the health of its population and the future of its children (Monbiot 2015).

As the current socioeconomic system is already global, it cannot indefinitely expand in space, as it has done in the past, to maintain its inbuilt growth dynamic. Today, it can only expand in time and borrow from the future. However, borrowing from the future also has limits. Planetary boundaries for a safe operating space for humanity are overstretched already (Steffen et al 2015). In the medium and long term, exponential growth can only happen in the spheres of consciousness, which is the precondition for transforming the socioeconomic model of growth into a more just and sustainable model.

More than twenty years ago, the economist Herman Daly wrote that growth means getting bigger while development means getting better. Going back to fundamentals, we need to address basic questions such as: what products and services do we need; how do we provide them with minimum adverse effects; what do we do with industries that generate profits at the expense of the health and well-being of people and ecosystems; and how do we deal with increasing inequality?

When the creative potential of human beings moves to the core, and when individual, societal and environmental needs are taken seriously, the economy becomes a worthy undertaking far beyond its current significance. It would not only produce what is needed, but also enable people to grow and become creative. The function of the economy would be providing for the needs of others, not serving selfish goals.

Instead of emphasizing greed, new questions would arise – questions about the meaning of work, the necessity of products and services, the consequences of production. Owners and shareholders would care what is being produced and what effect it has. In this way, the system would be regenerative, instead of destroying itself through externalities.

Many countries are still experiencing economic growth, but as we argued above, in the medium and long term a process of slowing down and cutting back is inevitable. In the absence of effective redistributive measures, more people will have to tighten their belts, living on reduced pay checks and smaller bank accounts. This is a fearful prospect for many. Nevertheless, there are constructive ways how to rebalance income and expenses. On the income side, people will try to diversify their incomes instead of relying on one job. They will harness slumbering talents and become active in new professions and new sectors. People will grow more of their own food, produce art and crafts, serve people with special needs, start new enterprises, etc.

On the expenses side, the level of ingenuity some people display for living on a low budget is astounding and inspiring. There is enthusiasm, mainly among young people, to live without cars, to form sharing economies, and to build new types of accommodation cheaply. Saving money and being kind to nature

has become a new frontier that can help mitigate the prosperity shock that is likely to follow the next financial crisis.

Those who ignore this prospect and expect that jobs will be given to them will discover that there is no altruistic gene in the economic system. Individual politicians and business leaders may care, but they are bound by the system, and the system has no feelings. Social safety nets have so far absorbed the unemployed, but in the future, due to political change or sovereign default, the social state is at risk. If states go bankrupt, they will be unable to pay salaries and subsidies, leading to dramatic consequences for a large percentage of the population.

For many years, our economic system rewarded those who said, “I want, give me” while ignoring others who practiced the idea “I have, let’s share”. Increasingly, however, the momentum of self-interest seems to wear out. Greed, frivolity and hedonism are out of fashion. Many people look for something more meaningful in their lives. Looking for meaning gives them greater happiness than serving the needs of shareholders, the consumer culture or the rat race.

There is a proliferation of literature promoting the sharing economy, the collaborative economy, the gift economy, the economy for the common good, the economy of communion, caring economics, the economics of abundance, social and solidarity economy, etc. The common thread in this literature is a de-emphasis of self-interest and a re-emphasis on the common good, both as an individual choice and as a systemic feature of a new approach to economics. A similar phenomenon is also happening in many other spheres: nutrition, health, education, energy, etc.

Many people are changing their lives and lifestyles. Those who were dedicating themselves fully to their career are (re)discovering the beauty of slowness, enjoying family, friends, hobbies, spending time in nature. The slow food movement, the slow travel movement or even the slow email movement are examples of this trend (Honore 2005).

Some people place greater emphasis on the importance of leisure, cultural activities, or friendships; others put increasing amounts of time into voluntary work and socially oriented start-ups. Witness, for instance, the rise of the social labs movement and social entrepreneurship.⁸

The slowdown we experience is not just about the economy; it reflects a broader cultural shift, including a shift in values. Realizing that life has more to offer than a fat bank account, fewer people are willing to work 12 or 16 hours a day in the pursuit of a career. In 2006, a *Harvard Business Review* survey revealed that 65 percent of respondents between 25 and 44 said they would decline a promotion that required more energy from them (Hewlett & Buck Luce 2006). At first sight, this may seem like an expression of laziness. However, many who make these choices do not want to live life on easy street; they want to focus their attention on meaningful activities. They live according to what Mahatma Gandhi once said: “Speed is irrelevant if you are moving in the wrong direction.”

If we look underneath the recent hype and anxiety, the message for those who can afford a slowdown is clear: reconnect with who you truly are and what you really want to do. If we disregard these signals – if instead of slowing down, we try to accelerate – we do so at the risk of a more drastic slowdown in the future. If we decide we want more of the same, we may get it at the cost of sacrificing our health, well-being, our relationships and friendships. Phenomena such as burnout, depression and nervous

⁸ At the same time, it is worth keeping in mind that for billions of people on this planet, life realities are opposite. They live in squalor, are hungry, and need to care about income as a first priority. Most of these people live in developing countries, but an increasing number of poor people live in industrialized nations.

breakdown are not confined to people on the fast track. But if those on the fast track change their ways, they help themselves and others who are dependent on them.

An increasing number of leaders are aware of this cultural shift and they care about the well-being of their subordinates. They avoid pressuring people into continuous acceleration, but help them form environments where they can thrive, using their potential to be creative. Instead of installing more controls in an attempt to speed up and achieve unrealistic targets, leaders can focus their ingenuity on ways of releasing the power of free will, initiative and self-determination. In this way, they can do their share in catalysing the New Renaissance.

Example 3 – The Financial System

The financial system is part of the economy, but due to its significance, it shall be treated separately. Key questions regarding the financial system are how to reduce financial instability, what to do with tax havens, how to stop loan sharks, and how to create a financial system that works for all people.

In the financial sphere, one of the most important long term trends has been a gradual detachment of the financial system from the real economy. The financial system is often compared to a global casino driven by speculative capital. Asset prices (for example, stocks but also real estate, raw material prices and other assets) are increasingly delinked from “real” economic indicators. “Adjustments” and “crashes” restore temporary balance but they do not create stability. Due to the interdependence of economies and financial systems, disturbances cannot be contained. The timing of shocks is difficult to foresee. When they occur, they spread quickly, accelerated by computers driving financial market decision-making.

Overall, the systemic risks that can lead to a Domino Effect have increased in recent years. A key driver of systemic risk is the exponential growth of public debt. In his book *The Crash Course*, Chris Martenson (2011:7-8) wrote:

Even if we were to limit ourselves to examining just the economy while ignoring energy and the environment, we could make a compelling case that prosperity faces the most daunting structural headwinds seen in generations. ... we might note that the developed world has doubled its debt load over the past 10 years.... Even more dramatically, we have recently seen an explosive expansion in unmatched pension and entitlement liabilities in a majority of developed nations.

The financial crisis has shown that familiar policies, which used to work in the past, are losing their effectiveness. The amount of money needed to intervene in financial markets is staggering. James Felkerson (2011) of the University of Missouri calculated that the US Federal Reserve bailout commitment by 2011 was in excess of \$29 trillion. The actual cost of bailouts is difficult to calculate, as such figures would need to include the actual expenses and returns, as well as the compound interest that accumulates on the additional debt raised to cover the bailouts.

The bailouts since 2008, first of companies, then of states, have further indebted future generations and created moral hazard. Instead of solving underlying problems, the bailouts aggravated them by keeping bankrupt, non-functional entities afloat, and by giving the message that if an institution or country is large enough, they will not be allowed to fail.

Taxpayer funds were spent on inflexible and dysfunctional institutions: banks, car companies facing bankruptcy, as well as countries that got used to deficit spending. Throwing a lifeline to these entities planted the seeds of the next crisis. After the financial institutions were saved, many of them went back

to similar risk taking behaviours that brought them into trouble in the first place. Powerful lobbies prevented strong regulatory measures that could mitigate future crises.

The effect of bailouts is to soften the shock in the present at the expense of future prosperity. By artificially propping up current wealth, governments launched a boomerang. Take the example of the United States. Since 2009, the US deficit has declined, but with a forecast deficit of around \$500 billion per year, the debt will continue to skyrocket. According to the US Department of the Treasury, historical debt outstanding has more than tripled from \$5.7 trillion in 2000 to \$18.2 trillion in 2015.⁹ As a result, rating agencies downgraded the creditworthiness of US debt, thus increasing the cost of new borrowing and throwing the fragile system of public finance into a vicious circle. As there is no viable plan to reduce the debt, the question is no longer whether we will witness a meltdown, but when.

The idea that rich countries are lenders of last resort is flawed, because there are no rich countries. The wealthy nations are rich only in terms of private assets, not in terms of sovereign finances. Even the richest countries are moving toward insolvency on all levels: local, regional, and national. Borrowing at the expense of the future is not a solution: it is merely a way of shirking problems in the present. Through profligate ways, debts were piled onto future generations. The children of today are not born bankrupt; they start life with a negative balance, a liability that will hamper their capacity to build a world according to their imagination.

If resources can no longer be mobilized from future generations, there is one potential source of public funds: international tax havens where enormous sums of money are hiding. Governments have so far shied away from tapping tax havens, but after the “Panama Papers” scandal in the Spring of 2016, governments are moving, a bit, toward tightening regulations.

Overall, it is worth keeping in mind that there is no shortage of money as such, only a problem of distribution and fair taxation.

If we think about possible solutions beyond tapping tax havens, there are two perspectives that need to be considered: the perspective of each country in isolation, and the perspective of all countries together, that is, the systemic perspective. From the perspective of each country, there is the option of imposing limits to borrowing at all levels: local, regional and national. If there is a budget surplus, a certain share could be allocated to debt reduction; and reversely, if there is a risk of deficit, there could be an obligation to ensure balanced budgets. This way, debts would be reduced over time. Without “hard” limits, political actors will always be tempted to spend more than what they have at their disposal.

From the perspective of one country, lowering public debt is a reasonable choice, as the money allocated to debt service can be spent on other priorities. However, if every country were to reduce public debt, there would be a systemic problem. In a debt-based monetary system, “somebody” has to make debts because all money is coupled with the same amount of debt. If the size of the economy increases, the amount of money and therefore the amount of debt increases as well. In the financial crisis it has increased dramatically even without economic growth through so-called quantitative easing.

The question, then, is who owns the money and who has to service the debts. There are only three possibilities: households, enterprises or the state:

1. Households in Europe have on average more money than debt. This is due to the post-war decades of almost uninterrupted expansion of income, coupled with more recent demographic decline. This created a generation that inherits private wealth, albeit unequally distributed.

⁹ https://www.treasurydirect.gov/govt/reports/pd/histdebt/histdebt_histo5.htm

2. Most enterprises avoid debt beyond a certain level because it impacts their stability, competitiveness and profitability. This means that debt is not easily expandable in this sector.
3. The state tries to increase taxes to get a greater share of private wealth but this has limits in political systems in which there are voters. The average private wealth is higher in countries like Italy than in Germany and for the public debt the reverse applies, which is an example for the rule that debt must increase somewhere. The only sector that can (and, in our current monetary system, also has to) increase debt is the public sector. This necessity is built into the system. This is why public debt, in contrast to private debt, is not meant to be paid back on a system-wide level.

Public debt is serviced by two means: more public debt or inflation that reduces the actual value of the debt without reducing the numbers. There is no example where a country has fully paid back public debt. Fiscal overspending is an enforced systemic consequence of the monetary system. Individual countries can decide to follow fiscal discipline. It is now enshrined in German law, for instance. Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble often speaks about the “black zero” (“die schwarze Null”). But this means that countries exercising fiscal discipline export the systemic consequences to other countries. This is the situation in the Eurozone. If one country does not make debts, other countries have to compensate by making more debt, which in turn increases the imbalance between Eurozone countries even further.

This is why currencies have a life cycle. In debt-based monetary systems, permanent economic growth and exponential developments accelerate at the end of such a cycle. The compound interests ultimately lead to a crash and a new start with a new currency. The question is not whether but when this happens. In Europe, new currencies were introduced after the Second World War. The DM was introduced in Germany in 1948. The Euro was not a new currency as the previously existing national currencies were simply converted into Euros based on their value at that time.

A special case is the dollar. The Americans found ways to avoid the collapse of their currency that would be due already by making it a global currency. Oil is traded in dollars. Most countries hold dollars, especially when there is a trade imbalance. As a consequence, nobody has an interest to make the dollar collapse.

The same system is started over and over again in history with little learning, despite successful micro experiences of non-debt based monetary systems. When the debt-based monetary system create unbearable situations for ordinary people, they start to help themselves, but generally these attempts were outlawed after a short time, with the central bank reclaiming control over issuing money. Increasingly, the right to create money as debt is being delegated to private banks, despite the fact that money is a common good. This is the one of the root causes of the systemic failures.

Debt-based money serves the upper class well, true to the famous quote attributed, correctly or wrongly, to Mayer Amschel Rothschild: “Permit me to issue and control the money of a nation, and I care not who makes its laws!” Most politicians do not know about these intricacies and therefore cannot muster the political will to change this situation, by making money a true common good that serves the public.

Example 4 – The Energy System

Already since the 1960s, and especially since the oil crises of 1973 and 1979, we know that a transition from fossil fuels and nuclear energy to other energy sources is inevitable. Yet, in the following decades most countries continued to invest enormous public resources in fossil fuels and nuclear energy. In comparison, only a trickle of investment flew into clean energy and energy efficiency.

There were critical voices advocating change, for instance Paul Hawken (1984, 2000), Amory Lovins (1977, 2013), and Ernst Ulrich von Weizsäcker (1989, 2014). In 1977, Lovins wrote a book entitled *Soft Energy Paths*, where he explained why it is necessary to phase out large, centralized, capital-intensive megaprojects and start building a modular energy system based on cleaner technologies and energy efficiency. Most decision makers and opinion leaders in academia, politics and business did not take these views seriously. Thirty-nine years later, most countries still use tax-payer money to support fossil fuels and nuclear energy, despite growing awareness of the need to move toward conservation, efficiency and clean energy.

A modular, decentralized, ecological energy system is technically and economically feasible. If externalities and life-cycle costs are taken into account, such a system is cost-effective. Energy can be produced close to locations where it is actually used in order to avoid transmission losses. A resilient energy system is based on a mix of technologies, depending on the amount of energy needed as well as the local conditions of wind, water, hours of sunshine, geothermal sources, wave energy, etc. However, an energy system utilizing clean sources of energy is still decades away, as current energy providers use their formidable lobby power to prevent change, believing they must think first and foremost in terms of quarterly profits in order to serve their shareholders.

The way forward is to give clear political and economic signals, including (1) redirecting public research and development funds toward conservation, efficiency and clean energy; (2) introducing energy taxes that internalize externalities created by different energy technologies; this includes for instance charging the full cost of waste disposal, decommissioning, security and insurance to nuclear energy providers; (3) increasing sanctions for cover-ups, e.g. cover-ups of nuclear accidents; (4) strengthening security of nuclear power plants to minimize the risk of terrorism; (5) eliminating public subsidies and special treatment for fossil fuel and nuclear operators; (6) reducing entry barriers to organisations that promote a new energy paradigm; and (7) building smart energy grids with the necessary technological innovations to compensate for the disadvantages of clean energy.

In some countries, the energy transition is now underway. In Germany, for example, this responds to the will of the majority, albeit a shrinking majority because the process and political communication has been flawed. After the Fukushima disaster, the German government decided to phase out nuclear energy, which means that the traditional oligarchy of energy providers lost their quasi-monopolistic gains. This example shows that if political leadership and majority will in the population work hand in hand, a restructuring can take place. Also Italy, Switzerland and Belgium passed laws to phase out nuclear energy production. Austria, Norway and Ireland are already nuclear free. Even the most nuclear-friendly and dependent country in Europe, France, passed a law to decommission twenty nuclear plants in the next ten years and replace them by renewables and energy efficiency. At the same time, the nuclear lobby is influencing the European Commission to reintroduce subsidies for nuclear energy, arguing that it is necessary to reduce greenhouse gases and dependence on Russian fossil fuels.

Example 5 – Migration

The refugee crisis has caught Europe off guard and is testing the limits of European political cohesion. According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), more than one million migrants came to Europe in 2015 (UN Refugee Agency 2015). This number is high if we compare it to numbers in previous years, but it is low compared to worldwide migratory movements. Most people still migrate within their region and only a fraction of them have the financial means to pay for a journey to Europe. Many non-European countries receive higher percentages of

migrants than the European countries that are currently integrating the most migrants in relation to their domestic population.

There is a striking split within Europe between

- the Southern countries through which most refugees enter Europe without the intention to stay there because these countries are in a situation of serious economic downturn;
- the Central and Eastern European countries that refuse to take in refugees even though they have the lowest percentage of foreigners in their population;
- former colonial empires (France, UK) that have already received many people from other cultures, but that now show to be increasingly reluctant to accept further migrants;
- and economically strong countries that have a declining demographic situation (Germany, Sweden) and that initially welcomed refugees.

The debate on refugees illustrates deep cleavages on migration in Europe. The gamut of perspectives ranges from those who believe that Europe benefits from unlimited immigration to those who would set immigration to zero and expel asylum seekers who are already in the country. In what follows, we do not focus on extreme positions. Rather, we present a synthesis of key arguments and conclude with a policy proposal that balances a wide range of concerns.

Multiculturalists. Proponents of immigration state that with a population of about 500 million, the EU could easily cope with a greater share of global migration, especially as many European countries have shrinking domestic populations. They argue that migratory influx increases ethnic and cultural diversity, which they see as generative for creative societies. For this reason, they explicitly welcome cultural and religious differences. They also claim that migration is needed to uphold the social security and pension systems and to fill jobs that locals are unwilling to do. They discount the fact that many migrants never become net contributors of social security and pension schemes, thus putting pressure on already strained systems.

Many advocates of a humanitarian perspective agree that there are short-term and long-term problems associated with mass migration, but they contend that protecting lives and promoting tolerance is more important than any problems that have occurred and that may occur in the future. Humanitarian arguments are often framed by the view that Europe is wealthy; that many European citizens were refugees too; that refugees are human beings in need; and that civilised societies cannot morally afford expelling, or not accepting, people who face a risk of being detained, tortured and killed in their home countries.

Sceptics. Another group of people — we may call them sceptics — are sympathetic to humanitarian arguments, but they claim that most migrants are economic ones. They say that it is natural that people move to places where they expect better economic futures. No one should be blamed for trying to improve their economic status. Nevertheless, sceptics ask if there is a moral duty to help migrants improve their economic condition when there are many locals who do not know how to make ends meet. The question therefore is: who needs help the most and who should be prioritized in light of limited financial and human resources?

Sceptics note that helping one group impairs the ability to help others. Refugees who make it to Europe are generally not the ones in direst need of help. Those who would need help the most are stuck in their home countries, or in neighbouring countries, because they are unable to pay thousands of Euros to traffickers.

If we accept the existence of trade-offs and a need to prioritize, there are five options: the first option is to prioritize support for migrants that are already in Europe; the second option is to help the desperate poor who are stuck in war zones or in refugee camps in neighbouring countries; the third option is to prioritize the domestic poor; the fourth option is to help everyone, spreading scarce resources thinly across a great number of people. The latter option will benefit everyone, but it will not make a real difference in improving life conditions. A fifth option would be to use part of the money for introducing an education system that helps people help themselves. For more details, see *Example 6 – Education* (p. 25ff). Overall, there may be no “best option”, but there is a case for becoming clear about trade-offs and dilemmas, and more explicit about why certain beneficiaries are prioritized over others.

The Number’s Game. Sceptics say that the more priority is given to migrants, the more will come. There is a widespread perception that Europe is already flooded by migrants beyond its coping capacity. Frontex, the European Union Agency responsible for border management, writes that 1.82 million migrants illegally crossed EU borders in 2015, an increase of more than 600% compared to the previous record of 2014 (Frontex 2016).

One issue is the number of new arrivals; another issue is demographics. It is well known that migrants have a higher average birth rate than the domestic populations in Europe. Furthermore, there are multiplier effects generated by successive waves of immigration. So far, the largest group of migrants have been young males. Some of them brought their families along; others intend to apply for family unification. These families then attract relatives; relatives attract further migrants. And so on. A classic example of a snowballing effect.

Accepting a million migrants per year on top of the significant numbers that are already inside Europe could grow to a large proportion of the population in a few decades. For a proper assessment, there is a need for unbiased research on scenarios of migration, taking into account differential birth rates and other multiplier effects. We need estimated timelines when migrants become the majority in particular cities and countries. It is important to know whether this will take 10 years, 20 years, 100 years — and based on which assumptions.

Demography and snowballing effects are not the only reasons why migrant communities are growing. Wars, political persecution, environmental crisis, lack of clean water, overpopulation and many other interrelated factors are likely to accelerate migrant flows. Ideally, European nations would help address these problems at the point of origin. This would need sound recipes and mechanisms. The history of development aid has shown that transferring funds to governments in developing countries usually fails to achieve sustained change. Much of this money has ended in black holes of corruption. A more effective route has been to provide funds to civil society organisations, even though it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between ethical players and those who are in this sphere to fill their pockets. In absence of international solutions to mitigate the above mentioned problems at the point of origin, there is no choice but to deal with migration inside Europe.

Cultural issues. Opinions greatly diverge on the question how mass migration will change the face of Europe. Advocates of migration tend to believe in multiculturalism. They say that a melting pot of different ethnicities and cultures can positively evolve society. Sceptics, in contrast, believe that some cultures are compatible, while others are not. They argue that the cultures of many migrants are non-compatible with “Western” culture, especially in areas such as women’s rights, LGBT rights, educational freedoms and the separation of state and church. Sceptics point to practices such as forced marriage, honour killings and genital mutilation to illustrate the prevalence of premodern customs in postmodern (and increasingly transmodern) Europe. Sceptics are also disturbed by symbolic habits such as women covering their face or men refusing to shake hands with women.

Sceptics agree that these and other practices are not valid for all migrants. Nevertheless, they are concerned that increasing numbers of migrants will change the cultural identity of individual countries, and of Europe as a whole. They believe that there is a threshold at which immigration becomes a threat to the social order. The sceptical reasoning can be summarized as follows:

Even if short-term needs such as food and shelter can be secured for millions, there is insufficient capacity to ensure a good life for migrants (or to help them ensure it for themselves). Once the initial enthusiasm of volunteers is fading, migrants will be faced by the impersonal bureaucratic apparatus as their primary point of contact. The lack of welcoming human relations is likely to create disappointment among migrants who often arrive with an idealised preconception of life in Europe.

The power of disappointment and the complex dynamics of changing perceptions should not be underestimated. Misunderstandings or unmet needs can turn into conflicts. These phenomena can already be observed in refugee camps and migrant communities. However, it would be too easy to point to migrants as the only source of potential conflict and thereby overlook how the rise of populist and xenophobic movements contributes to tensions. In their daily lives, migrants experience overt and subliminal hostility. They encounter fear, rejection, wry looks, difficulties to get a job. They also deal with administrative obstacles, excessive waiting times for permits, language difficulties, and many other problems that create dissonance and undermine trust. As a result, many migrants feel alienated, hopeless and not welcome, which augments the potential for future conflicts.

It is hard to predict to what extent these dynamics will lead to serious conflicts, who might start them, and how they might evolve. What we can say with some certainty is that in case of conflicts, migrants are likely to side with their “brothers and sisters”. The indigenous populations will do the same. This may create volatile situations that can quickly escalate. All that is needed is a spark that causes the barrel of gunpowder to explode. Witness, for instance, the situation of the Roma in Central and Eastern Europe, or the situation of blacks in the United States. There is a deeply engrained “us versus them mentality”, a mutual fear and antagonism that cannot be denied or wished away.

A risk assessment should not only focus on potential struggles between migrants and the domestic population, but also on tensions among migrants from different countries, ethnicities and religious beliefs. Divisions between Sunnis and Shiites, for instance, are fuelling ongoing wars in the Middle East and Africa. Through migration, these conflicts are imported to Europe. It is hard to see how there could be a quantum leap towards a culture of dialogue and reconciliation in the near future.

Unless we develop a culture that builds bridges, we should be careful to bring together people whose consciousness is not ready for peaceful co-existence and long-term mutual friendship. Before such a consciousness becomes widespread, it is necessary to set policies based on existing realities, not wishful thinking. There are many examples of well integrated migrants, but there are no examples of successful integration of millions of citizens from different cultural spheres. Moreover, there are no effective recipes for dealing with the racist backlash that is bound to intensify as a result of mass immigration.

Many people believe that asylum seekers get better treatment than the indigenous population, that they abuse the welfare system, that males with migrant backgrounds are a threat to local women, that migrants are disproportionately involved in crime, that they are ungrateful for the help they receive, that they are lazy, etc. These views are spread in overt and subtle ways by the media, including the social media, creating an explosive mix of resentment and fear that is fuelling the rise of populist and extremist parties as well as paramilitary groups.

For those who are racist, the colour of the skin is reason enough to reject migrants. A similar reflex is displayed by Islamophobes, except that their object of concern is not the colour of skin but the faith. Phenomena such as racism and Islamophobia are part of the same mind-set.

In most countries, extremists are (still) a relatively small minority, but they have increasing influence in shaping the public debate and the perceptions of the majority. Many people are (still) open to receive foreigners and they have no problem with Islam as a religion. However, they are troubled by anti-Western, anti-secular and anti-democratic tendencies in many migrant communities. These tendencies are most prevalent in Muslim communities. This is why some people argue that it is better to accept, say, Ukrainians rather than people from the Middle East and Northern Africa. The underlying fear is that cities, regions and countries might gain a Muslim majority, or a strong and confident minority, which struggles for dominance and attempts to impose their views.

The process of subtle Islamization can be observed for many years in Turkey, a country that used to be a bulwark of secularity until Recep Tayyip Erdoğan became prime minister in 2003. The Islamization of Turkey has been proceeding step by step underneath a veil of modernity. Erdoğan has fused personal, national pride and Islamic pride in ways that triggered an increasingly militant domestic and international stance, including a flare-up of the war against the Kurds and a suppression of the opposition. The leader cult and the reduction of media freedom have contributed to the erosion of democracy, moving Turkey toward authoritarianism. In December 1997, Erdoğan recited a poem written by Ziya Gökalp, a sociologist, writer, and pan-Turkish activist. The recitation included the words "The mosques are our barracks, the domes our helmets, the minarets our bayonets and the faithful our soldiers...". These words are not in the original version of the poem (BBC News 2002).

Islamization has many forms and shades, ranging from subtle changes in habits, perceptions and cultural identity all the way to fundamentalism. According to the German domestic intelligence service, the number of known Salafists in Germany has doubled between 2012 and 2015 to 8650, with 1100 people counted as a potential terror risk (Kaleta, Reimann & Weiland 2016).

Also beyond Germany, there has been a disquieting rise of militancy. Examples include hate speech practised in some Mosques, the recruitment for the Islamic State, the appearance of "Sharia police" on the streets, the intimidation of Muslims who contradict archaic rules, and the murder of moderates. Conciliatory Muslims are increasingly intimidated by extremists who try to enforce their way of life. Especially in France, Belgium and the UK, there has been a growth of ghettos, in which fundamentalism thrives. Entire districts in cities are moving beyond the reach of law enforcement. At the same time, there has been a rise of secular criminal families, which have proven difficult to penetrate for law enforcement.

Advocates of migration correctly argue that the vast majority of Muslims are neither fundamentalist nor criminal. Nevertheless, sceptics pointing to real and disturbing trends that may be further exacerbated by mass migration. The repressive dimensions of an increasingly politicized Islam give cause for concern, both in terms of what happens in the EU and in countries with a Muslim majority.

Regardless of who is right in this debate, Europe's recurrent internal self-division results in major imbalances in the geographical distribution of refugees. The choice of the Central/Eastern European countries is shrinking over mixing, of Germany/Sweden has been mixing over shrinking. When Sweden reversed its course, Germany stood isolated in Europe. From late 2015 onwards, Germany has revised its open asylum policy step by step, by arranging the refugee deal with Turkey, by reinstalling border controls, and by putting more countries on the list of safe countries (Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro, Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco). Migrants from these countries now have a less than 1% chance to get asylum in Germany.

EU Policy failure. The idea of quotas allocated centrally by the European Union is unlikely to work in practice. Firstly, several countries are strongly against such procedures. With every terrorist attack, with further waves of immigration, and with all the above mentioned problems, this opposition is likely to strengthen. Secondly, migrants do not want to be stuck in unwanted exiles. They have proven skilful in avoiding forced placement. It is unlikely that they will stay put in places where policy makers in Brussels want to have them. Third, the redistribution of 160,000 migrants from Italy and Greece to the rest of the EU is not working as planned. Between late summer 2015 and February 2016, less than one percent have been resettled. If a resettlement of 160,000 migrants cannot be completed, how could a resettlement of millions work?

Currently, there seem to be two main possibilities: Either European policy makers come up with a more effective EU border protection regime and new solutions limiting the number of migrants. These solutions need to have greater popular support than the deal with Turkey to take back refugees from Greece. Or policy makers continue muddling through, proposing unpopular solutions such as the forced distribution of migrants, which will further increase anti-EU sentiments in many countries.

Some people argue for a third option: a humanitarian politics. Those who advocate this stance are a small minority. They believe that the EU as a whole should welcome refugees in the way that German Chancellor Angela Merkel has shown in 2015. This is unlikely in light of a rise of anti-immigrant sentiments. Since 2015, anti-immigrant parties have seen an increase in the number of new followers. At the same time, moderate right wing parties have been shifting their policies. Together with populist or extremist parties, they now form the majority in many countries. Left-wing parties are no longer unified either, as many members are sceptical toward mass migration.

The perspective on migration changes depending on the lens through which one views the issue. Adopting a micro view, a compassionate person feels the pain of migrants, many of whom bring traumatic experiences from wars in their country. The stories and pictures of drowned people and families stuck in camps in front of closed borders is gut-wrenching.

Adopting a macro view, the broader societal implications of mass migration come into focus. The long-term problems are mind-boggling and the good solutions hard to find. If migration pressures remain strong, middle-of-the-road policies will not be effective. The question is not whether to close the borders, but to what extent, how, where and when, toward whom, how to deal with people who are at the borders already, and how to relate to those who already entered, and still enter, illegally.

Some advocates of migration, and even some sceptics, think that nothing can be done. They say that if one route is closed down, such as the Balkan route via Macedonia, refugees find other ways, for example the route through Bulgaria or Italy. According to this perspective, it is impossible to guard thousands of kilometres of borders; it is impossible to build fences that are capable of keeping off determined people; it is impossible to force migrants to accept asylum in one country when they want to be in another; it is impossible to stop migrants from finding ways to avoid being returned to their home countries, and to extend and ultimately legalize their stay.

It is not yet possible to assess these arguments, because EU borders are still porous. No one knows what would happen if a more restrictive border management were introduced.

For some time to come, migration policy will remain an experiment based on trial and error. We predict that policy makers will continue with plans to distribute migrants in Europe and that this will ultimately fail. This phase will be followed by a renationalisation of migration policy. Populist right wing governments will gain further support. As a result, the right to asylum will be either revised, or ignored in practice. More and more countries will adopt their own border management, spelling an end to the

free movement guaranteed by the Schengen regime. There will be growing competition between countries adopting ever more restrictive measures. More open countries will have no choice but to follow, as none of the European populations, not even the Germans, want to see further mass inflows of migrants. For good or for bad, the scenario of “Fortress Europe” is looming on the horizon.

Systemic reform. In order to master the mass migration that is likely during the 21st century, we need coherent policies that appeal to proponents of migration as well as the sceptics. We need systemic reforms that avoid the ad hoc, piece-meal approach that has been chosen by most governments so far.

How could a future system of asylum and immigration look like?

A starting point would be to assume that extremes (i.e., unlimited immigration as well as zero immigration) are not desirable:

- A radical humanitarian policy would be to *accept all migrants*. This would mean that tens, if not hundreds of millions of migrants will come to Europe.
- The other extreme would be to *reject all migrants, including refugees whose lives are in danger*. This option would end the humanitarian traditions that are a core value of Europe.

We believe that a sound policy continues to accept refugees, i.e. people who are in danger in their home countries. Law-makers could choose between three possibilities that are outlined below: option 1, option 1+2, or option 1+2+3. Each country could switch between these policies and they could calibrate its parameters depending on future experience with the policy:

- 1) **Option 1:** Countries with a restrictive policy would enable a *temporary right to stay* that would be granted to refugees, except if there are clear signs of (a) an extremist orientation, (b) a criminal background or (c) cheating during the immigration procedure. For temporary stays, no distinction would be made between qualified and unqualified refugees. Permits would be granted with yearly extensions until the war in the respective country of origin has ceased. For politically persecuted individuals and their families, the right to stay would be extended until there is a regime change. Emphasis would be placed on the responsibilities of refugees, not only on their rights. Among these responsibilities would be to learn the local language, the fundamentals of the constitution and the legal system, the status of women’s rights, cultural habits, etc. There would be zero tolerance for crime, except for harmless transgressions (e.g. minor traffic violations). Likewise, there would be zero tolerance for fundamentalist activities.
- 2) **Option 2:** *Refugees could be given a choice between the above mentioned 1-year extendable right to stay and medium-term stays* (say, 3 to 5 years, with an option for one or more extensions). For medium-term permits, preference would be given to qualified individuals who commit to fulfil a sequence of conditions for integration, including concrete milestones in terms of work and societal contribution. Those seeking medium-term permits would need to demonstrate compatibility with European culture and a commitment to the liberal, democratic, and secular traditions of open societies. Holders of medium-term permits would be allowed to register new companies and social enterprises, or join existing ones as co-owners or managers.
- 3) **Option 3:** The most open policy could also include an *option for permanent residency and, ultimately, citizenship* after fulfilling requirements for integration and societal contribution. The policy would include a provision for loss of permanent residency and citizenship in case of serious crime. This could be defined in terms of an unconditional prison sentence in excess of one year, including a “three strikes and you are out” provision for unconditional prison sentences below one year. These rules would apply to all foreigners, not just newcomers. Even if someone is already in a country for many years and has permanent residency or citizenship,

the rights could be revoked in case of serious crime. The rules need to be sufficiently tough to discourage criminals and criminal families, which are not impressed by the weak measures currently imposed by democratic states.

Some countries may extend the above policy to include a certain number of highly qualified economic migrants. In accordance with the principle of democracy and self-determination, countries should be able to choose their policy. For instance, if Germany continues receiving the lion share of migrants, it could tighten its policy, offering only Option 1. As long as other countries offer Options 2 and 3, some refugees who initially wish to go to Germany might switch their preference, because other countries offer them better conditions. In theory, there is a possibility that all countries chose Option 1 or even tighter regulations. This is not likely, unless there is some kind of cataclysmic event (e.g. terrorists exploding a “dirty bomb” in a major European city).

The precise conditions of the new migration policy would be set by each government. It would include improved background checks, complemented by interviews and whatever other evidence can be found. If there is no evidence and if the chosen means of assessment fail, permits would not be granted. The same applies if migrants are caught lying or producing false documents. Migrants need to be informed beforehand about these conditions in their mother tongue.

General policy parameters include:

- Shorter asylum procedures;
- More effective measures for returning refugees who fail these procedures;
- The ability to calibrate the number of issued permits in line with administrative capacity, availability of dignified housing (instead of mass accommodation), educational opportunities, civil society projects leading to relationship building, trauma treatment, etc.;
- Improving the Schengen controls (which have been often neglected) to filter out terrorists among migrants (such as the terrorists involved in the Paris attacks, which came along with a group of migrants);
- A right to work for refugees;
- Public works programmes (workfare, not welfare) for those who do not find a job;
- Support for projects creating trust and lasting friendships between locals and refugees.

A key component of a new migration policy would be educational opportunities tailor-made to the needs of refugees, including leadership training for high potentials who commit to return to their countries. Moreover, educational curricula in general should be revised. Humanitarian traditions need to be explained and re-explained in order to prevent the rise of fascism. At the same time, space should be given to reflect about one’s sense of identity and belonging. When we get to know the origins of our culture and traditions, we (re)gain an appreciation for the value of their homeland, and we are less prone to fall for cheap slogans. There is a difference between love of the homeland on the one hand, and nationalism based on discrimination, bias and racism on the other hand. Nationalism is a scourge. But if love of the homeland is missing, it becomes an entry door for disintegrative trends from inside and outside, whether in the form of Bolshevism, consumerism, the influx of sects, or Islamism (which needs to be distinguished from Islam).

Example 6 – Education

In diagnosing the state of education, especially higher education, we may begin with the *academic anomaly*: Never before in human history there have been more graduates, more scientific research, more new knowledge produced every year, and more ease in accessing and spreading information worldwide.

At the same time, for half a century already, our modern civilisation is increasingly unsustainable, with growing inequality and intergenerational injustice. There are many countries (including European countries), in which a substantial proportion of the younger generation has little chance to find a place in the globalised economic system that would be in line with their talents. How can this happen, if (in Western countries at least) the majority of politicians, CEOs and leaders of influential civil society organisations attended higher education institutions?

Manmade Grand Challenges are the hallmark of the 21st century: increasing inequality, mass migration, climate change and biodiversity loss, resource shortages and information overload, to name just a few. These are conditions of a hyper-complex society (Qvortrup 2003) that require learning for an unknown future (Barnett 2012). The current paradigm in education, despite its internal diversity and some countervailing practices, did not prevent the large-scale failure of respecting the boundaries of our planet and the dignity of sentient beings; it rather seems to participate in it. The prevalent educational paradigm did not stimulate individual, social and cultural development in a deeper and broader sense. Coming from another historical era, the current system did little to transform itself in order to become a catalytic force in addressing the Grand Challenges of the 21st century. This is why we see a need for new approaches to education, including higher education. Incremental reforms did not show capable of resolving the fundamental mismatch between higher education and society's Grand Challenges. This is why we need for system innovations that draw people and resources away from the existing system — a system that has become too entrenched and bureaucratic to remain capable of reinventing itself.

The modern university has been itself a new model of higher education that replaced the formerly dominant model, the medieval scholastic university. This did not happen in direct continuity, though. There was a longer phase of co-existence of both models. However, the new model ultimately replaced the old model, as it was better aligned with the worldviews and the societal conditions of the modern era. A similar process is likely to unfold in the coming decades — necessarily so, as the societal and educational challenges of the 21st century are fundamentally different from those of the 19th and 20th centuries, in which the current educational paradigm became the prevalent model.

We are no longer living in an era of information scarcity, which was one of the foundational conditions for the creation of “ivory tower” types of institutions. These made sense a few centuries ago: they attracted, pooled and protected the few literate persons and the few books that existed. These times were marked by information scarcity; our contemporary era is characterised by information overload. Almost any information (and disinformation) is available anytime at the fingertips of any user of a digital device connected to the Internet. There are now billions of these devices in daily use. It therefore makes little sense to continue focussing education primarily on placing subject matter experts in rooms with presumed novices for conveying information. Other educational approaches need to be brought to the fore.

Higher education could play a pivotal role as a catalyst of consciousness. Consciousness is critical because it is the source of cultural regeneration and renewal and the source of the New Renaissance. New kinds of being, knowing and acting are required, new curriculum and research designs, new ways of relating diverse stakeholders. Accordingly, a new institutional type in higher education is called for that some started to name the “transversity” (McGregor, Volckmann & Montuori 2011).

Transversities are transformative universities that are transdisciplinary, transparadigmatic, and transmodern. In some cases, they also include transcultural, transgenerational, transsectoral and translocal features. These “trans”-features are not marketing concepts, but they are critical components of a transformative mission and approach, enabling human capacity to intervene creatively in values-based ways in the dystopian trends of our century. The goal is to educate people able and willing to

catalyse change towards new visions, models and practices of individual and collective thriving within the planetary boundaries.

The core mission of transversities in the 21st century is to unlock higher human potential to generate sustainable futures and foster social justice. For this to happen, higher education has to act as a catalyst of social innovation and as an example of the sustainability transition. Transversities are laboratories of social change. No past, present or future symptomatic reforms of the existing higher education systems will lead to this outcome anytime soon, on any substantial scale. If the human adventure on planet earth shall continue under dignified conditions, we need a new model of higher education. This requires a redesign of all its dimensions: curriculum, research, outreach, organisational design, organisational culture, governance, financing and accreditation. Further areas of change include recruitment, career paths and incentives, assessment, degrees and titles, and last but not least the ways in which information and communication technology is used.

A New Renaissance can arise when a critical mass of people becomes familiar with the entire spectrum of learning – all the way from data, information, knowledge, understanding to wisdom. Moving from understanding to wisdom requires more integrative ways of thinking. But changing our thinking is merely the first step. Since consciousness goes beyond knowledge by integrating understanding and wisdom, a purely intellectual education focused on teaching values and worldviews is not sufficient. Alumni of such a curriculum may not live what they know, because their knowledge is just in their mind, not in their consciousness.¹⁰

If we want to promote the development of consciousness, the educational sphere (and the cultural sphere as a whole) need to be transformed to enable extensions from information and knowledge toward understanding and wisdom. Educational and other cultural institutions also need to strengthen the wisdom to action capacity (more precisely: wisdom to vision to action capacity).

The New Renaissance impulse is intimately connected to a new type of education based on deeper insights regarding human beings, our planet and the cosmos. The New Renaissance requires evolving toward coherent worldviews that do justice to the astounding complexity and mystery of the world. The widest possible term to refer to the holistic essence of education is Pansophy – the wisdom of everything, in everything.

In the 21st century, we will have to (re)learn skills such as how to grow food, how to build ecological houses, how to build communities, how to foster fulfilling relationships and meaningful friendships. Greater levels of self-sufficiency, flexibility and initiative are needed. A new approach to education frees enormous immaterial assets of creativity. The conditions of everyday life of the next generation depend on how we manage to free this unlimited resource, and this in turn depends on how we facilitate learning – individual learning, social learning and collective intelligence geared towards social change.

Example 7 – Technology

Today and in the future, individuals, families and communities can choose between visions of technophilia and orientations that adopt a more differentiated view of technological possibilities. The spectrum of positions on technological progress is wide. Some examples are given to illustrate the range of perspectives:

¹⁰ In recent years, the term mindfulness has spread. Although it comes close to consciousness, we chose not use it for two reasons: First, consciousness goes far beyond the mind (thus beyond *mindfulness*). Secondly, mindfulness is often associated with Buddhism, whereas consciousness is not attached to any religion or worldview.

1. *Transhumanists* believe in the duty to improve human beings and society through technology. They believe that the grand challenges of the 21st century can be mastered through technological innovation.
2. *Techno-progressivists* are in favour of technological development, while being ready to support regulation of unsafe, unfair and undemocratic forms of technological progress.
3. *Bioconservatives* reject technological alterations of the living world. Jürgen Habermas (2003), for instance, argues that moral autonomy depends on being free from another's unilaterally imposed specifications. On this basis, he opposes the genetic modification of embryos.
4. The group advocating the strongest boundaries around technological possibilities are *Neo-Luddites*. The most radical among them reject science and technology altogether. Others oppose specific types of technologies. For instance, bioluddites advocate a ban on modifications of living beings; media luddites advocate the elimination of electronic media; etc.

A New Renaissance perspective would be to distinguish between technologies, and between different ways of application. Such a perspective adopts a technophile position toward, for instance, clean energy technologies while taking more critical view of technologies that are proven harmful or that can cause unforeseen risks. Informed citizens who understand the effects of technologies can make up their mind in relation to the following developments:

1. Commercial R&D in areas such as artificial intelligence, automatization, robotics, nanomedicine, biotechnology and genetic engineering (GMO food, cloning, designer babies).
2. Military R&D in areas such as supersoldiers, remote controlled weaponry, cyber warfare and advanced weapons of mass destruction.
3. Experimental stage developments in areas such as space colonization, self-improving machines, superintelligence, 3D bioprinting, mind uploading, altered states of consciousness through neurotechnology, the elimination of gender, the perpetuation of humanity in virtual realities within megacomputers, the creation of human clones, cyborgs, human-animal chimeras, bioroids and subhumans, chemical brain preservation, machine implants, life extension technologies, cryonics and the development of posthuman beings for posthumanity.

Some of these developments are still science fiction, but if we consider the rate of technological progress, we need to be prepared that at least some of them will become reality. Therefore, it is necessary to start thinking about a new definition of Appropriate Technology (AT), which could be as follows:

Appropriate Technology is technology that has proven not to hinder human-led development of consciousness, not to impair human agency, not to eliminate natural processes such as aging, not to alter plants, animals and human beings, not to support escapes from the body, not to give unfair advantages to wealthy people who can afford expensive technologies, not to provide new means of control to corporations and totalitarian regimes, not to support eugenics¹¹, Social Darwinism and the development of a master race, not to impair human rights, not to “play God”, and not to undermine a sense of the sacred. Appropriate Technology is not used for killing or maiming. It applies the precautionary principle, it cannot remove itself from human control, it does not cause unforeseeable risks, it is tailor-made to the economic, cultural and natural conditions of the geographic area in which it is to be applied, it

¹¹ This includes new eugenics such as egalitarian liberal eugenics, which is also known as germinal choice and reprogenetics.

*is ecological, it works with natural organic processes, and it promotes self-sufficiency on the part of those using it.*¹²

Appropriate technology does not support extremes. It rejects anti-technology radicalism as much as techno-worship. AT creates an ethical framework for technological choice. It enables people to assess which technologies are beneficial and which are harmful. It advocates putting the precautionary principle into law. It proposes that academic institutions and companies are held responsible for the effects of technologies they invent and sell. If people and institutions are not held responsible, they will continue to develop technologies that represent serious and potentially catastrophic risks.

The factors that are currently driving technological progress are competitiveness, profit maximization, and the consumer culture. Psychological features also play a role, such as the fear of death and the obsession with slim bodies and physical perfection.

On a personal level, the New Renaissance seeks to enable free choice. After two centuries of increasingly rapid technological advances, people should be able to choose if they want to be ever more tightly integrated into systems of machines, or if they prefer a path toward emancipation from technology.

This starts with child-rearing. Many parents are tired of struggling with their children over the amount of time spent watching TV or playing with computers, tablets, smart phones, smart watches and the like. When these technologies are no longer available in the household, children get used to it. After a few hours of boredom, children do not miss these technologies, unless they have developed an addiction.

The less time is spent in “virtual” worlds, the more time is spent in the “real” world. By engaging in face-to-face communication, children, teenagers and adults will become more skilled in relationship building. They are more likely to develop multiple intelligences, including social and emotional intelligence. They will do more sports and spend more time in nature. And they are less likely to develop the syndrome known as “digital dementia” (Spitzer 2012).

Techno-enthusiasts see electronic media as a blessing, giving children a head start in life. This idea is promoted by tech companies and their supporters in academia, the ministries and the media. Many children and teenagers are already in the grip of corporate interests. Companies invest in ever more sophisticated ways to grow viewer numbers, to create brand loyalty and to maximize “likes”. They promise benefits such as friendship, love, memberships, but the real objective is much more mundane: making people buy products and services they would otherwise not buy.

The emancipation from technology holds promise not only for individuals, but also for organisations. Technology and productivity are not always positively correlated. Immersing people for weeks, months and years in machine environments exhausts people. Technology overload may partially explain the lack of creativity and happiness in organisations. This is why smart organisations think of ways to reduce technology immersion and increase the time spent in human and natural environments. This applies not only to traditional computer work, but also to next generation technologies such as holographic computing, 3D videoconferencing, cradle-to-grave e-learning, gamification, etc.

Adopting a macro view, we can foresee that a significant part of humanity will immerse themselves ever more deeply in high tech environments. For some this will be a conscious choice, a lifestyle they seek. For others, it will happen by default, as powerful interests guide them toward this condition.

¹² This expanded definition of Appropriate Technology is based on the definition in the Merriam-Webster dictionary.

A minority is likely to choose emancipation, trying to regain autonomy from the imposed specifications of the machine world, which has been put into place without their agreement and which increasingly lives a life of its own. The New Renaissance suggests a vision of human life that gives people a choice to reduce technological incursion in favour of technology free spaces as well as low-tech spaces.

Middle roaders, who try to juggle a technology-friendly life with time spent in nature will find it difficult to achieve a proper balance. As powerful interests guide them toward machine worlds, the time spent in these worlds is likely to increase. Machines have a tendency to absorb more and more time – time, which is not available for other pursuits. Once one swims in this river, it is difficult to move against the stream.

Example 8 – Media¹³

In times when media content is increasingly influenced by ownership interests and ideological allegiance, a critical skill is differentiating facts from fiction, as well as separating what is relevant from what is ballast. There is a need for media projects that promote investigative journalism and that highlight inconsistencies and manipulation.

Given the relevance of media in people’s lives and the relevance of media for politics, a core curriculum subject at high schools and universities should explain who controls the media, how marketing and PR influence opinion making, and which techniques are used to influence thinking and decisions. It should also show how different kinds of media, and the political and commercial interests behind them, are promoting an entertainment culture, which creates increasingly superficial and short-lived information. Numbers (of viewers, listeners, readers) increase the price of advertising and therefore the profit of media. Serious journalists are increasingly marginalised.

¹³ This is a stub – needs to be expanded in further revisions.

3. CAUSES

The dystopian trends of this century are symptoms. The important question is what are the causes and solutions. It is worthwhile to distinguish between immediate causes, intermediate causes, and root causes, and accordingly, between immediate solutions, intermediate solutions, and root solutions.

To learn about *immediate* causes for the symptoms we explored in the previous section, we can draw on literature in the social sciences. If we are interested in the *intermediate* causes (the causes of immediate causes), we can draw on literature that explains human behaviour (e.g. psychology). For understanding *root* causes, it can be useful to complement scientific approaches with insights from the world's wisdom traditions.

"The crisis of our time," writes Otto Scharmer from MIT, "isn't just a crisis of a single leader, organization, country or conflict. The crisis of our time reveals the dying of an old social structure and way of thinking, an old way of institutionalizing and enacting collective social forms" (2009:1).

The idea is that if we change of our way of thinking, we will be able to mitigate problems in society. This is only partly true. A "new way of thinking" on its own may not be sufficient to address the dystopian trends. As we stated at the outset, the root problem is unconsciousness. This is more than a flaw in thinking or a lack of knowledge; it is a lack of reaching one's Higher Self, one's higher potential.

As long as we are unconscious, we cannot be held responsible for our actions. We simply do not know who we are and what we are doing. However, this does not mean that there are no consequences. The belief that it is possible to get away with ignorance or wrongdoing – on the individual, group, community and society level – is one of the attitudes brought about by unconsciousness.

If the root cause of the current crises is unconsciousness, the question is where does this problem arise? Part of the answer is our upbringing and our education system, which fail to take into account the higher nature and potential of human beings. Thus, we are dealing with a recursive causal relationship, in which change on either side is welcome:

- 1) If we change the upbringing of children and our education system in ways that enable individual vocation and potential, greater consciousness results; and
- 2) If we work on the level of consciousness, we generate the need for a different upbringing and education system.

There are many ways in which our upbringing and education system prevent the rise of consciousness. One of them is the prevalence of materialist worldviews, which reduce the human being to an information processing unit, a biological computer. This perspective is not entirely wrong, but it is incomplete, one-sided and misleading. It denies the existence of consciousness, because it cannot measure it. Or it adopts a reductionist definition that does not threaten deeply held assumptions.

A similar problem arises in how we understand human life. To argue, for instance, that human beings maximize utility is not completely wrong, as most people behave like this most of the time. Nevertheless, this framework does not consider the freedom *not* to maximize one's utility and to act out of love for others. By ignoring consciousness, utility maximization and similar theories leave out the key dimension that is relevant for bringing humanity forward.

Many people believe that the answer to the problems of our time is a more spiritually informed worldview. However, even spiritually oriented people are not immune to materialist thinking and behaviour. There are myriads of ways in which materialist perspectives enter the spiritual realm, e.g.

- if we imagine higher forces in human terms (God as an old man with a beard, angels as winged human beings);
- if we meditate in order to become more successful in our careers;
- if we engage in charitable work to create “good karma” (or secure a place in heaven);
- if we read religious texts in literal ways;
- if we judge people based on whether they are believers or non-believers;
- if we build or sustain religious organisations with financial and hierarchical powers.

Spiritual materialism in all its variants is an expression of unconsciousness. The question is not whether we need a more spiritual approach, but what kinds of approaches are helpful. This is a question for every person to resolve for himself or herself.

Consciousness does not rely on academic reasoning, nor on belief. It is an authentic personal experience. In its discovery, human beings make use of their own innate capacity. This understanding can be shared by words, but it cannot be intersubjectively verified. Most theories, methods and technologies are still too coarse to capture the substance of consciousness. Using scientific approaches, one can record certain traces or effects, but not the phenomenon as such.

If someone decides to become more conscious, a starting point is to work on humility, modesty and patience. This is necessary for two reasons: first, it gives a good basic attitude for a process that is life long and demanding. Second, it helps avoid some of the risks of consciousness work such as the development of “spiritual ego”.

Patience is needed because there is no straight way to enlightenment. It usually takes a lot of self-inquiry, self-doubt, erroneous paths, before one gets a glimpse of insight. And even when this glimpse occurs, one is not automatically wise or enlightened. There will be further challenges, tests, temptations, illusions, despair. Many wise people have experienced dark nights of the soul, intense periods of confusion, periods in which they felt empty. These periods are necessary to snap out of existing tracks, erasing false stories and false self-image.

Box 1 lists five hypotheses about root causes.

Hypotheses

First, at the root level, the causes relate to consciousness.

Second, consciousness is important because it affects:

- IQ: values, worldviews, ways of perception, ways of thinking;
- EQ: heart virtues such as truthfulness, empathy, patience, gratitude, modesty, courage, warmth, reciprocity, forgiveness, and a sense for justice;
- SQ: quality and orientation of will, knowledge of one’s vocation.

Third, dysfunctions in any of these areas manifest in problems in the external world. Reversely, improvements in the external world can happen based on refining the same elements.

Fourth, there is a spectrum of consciousness, all the way from unconsciousness to high consciousness. The New Renaissance is a process of moving toward high consciousness.

Fifth, there is not only individual but also collective consciousness.

4. SOLUTIONS

Immediate solutions (symptom management). For many years, we could observe repeated rounds of symptomatic reforms and incremental system tweaking, resulting in the production of laws and regulations that sometimes made improvements, but overall failed to address systemic issues. As a result, a significant backlog of necessary alterations and transformations has accumulated. Political leaders, by and large, seem overwhelmed by the number and scale of problems. As a result, they focus on symptom management, dousing fires and pushing problems along. There is a widespread timidity to start overdue changes, especially changes at the fundamental, structural, systemic level.

Political leaders are often blamed for the state of society, but they are not the only, and sometimes not even the key actors. Various networks of elites, power brokers and lobbyists play roles in influencing decisions. The population also acts as a barrier to change. The resistance comes not only from those who profit from the old order; that is, those who enjoy superior standards of living. Paradoxically, resistance comes also from those who are exploited; those who are overwhelmed with the requirements of modern life; those who bear the burden of the current system. It is one of the paradoxes of our time that the poor and disenfranchised communities are voting for oligarchs who have no record of empathy and public service.

One can hardly blame political leaders for not being resolute, truthful and transparent, if voters do not support these qualities. As long as voters want to be reassured about their worldviews, politicians will promote figments of the imagination and tell voters what they want to hear. As long as voters want stability above all, politicians will not rock the boat, opting for symptom management that does not create waves.

Paradoxically, many politicians nowadays run on platforms of change. In this rhetorical ploy, business as usual is presented as “reform”; symptom management as “problem solving”; and support of the status quo as “innovation”.¹⁴ This rhetoric has become the norm not only in politics, but also in business, academia, international organisations, etc. In times when status quo actors become auguries of change, the ability to detect the difference between change makers and change talkers becomes a critical skill.

Many people are detecting the gaps between rhetoric and reality, but they react in different ways:

- some disconnect from politics and refrain to vote.
- others support “lesser evil” candidates.
- some are attracted by candidates who promise them a “revolution without ideas”.
- a further group supports whoever succeeds to entertain them and keep their attention.
- still others are attracted by straight talking extremists. This is not always a sign of extremist orientation among these voters. Many people vote for extremists, because they are tired of corrupt political elites and because extremists often point to real problems that the mainstream actors have been unable to solve.
- some people find it hard to locate themselves in the political landscape and are seeking for alternatives.

¹⁴ The “innovation agenda” is repeated so often that people do not notice how rarely it actually produces innovation. Paradoxically, innovation programmes sometimes cover up the lack of change. Mainstream actors develop these programmes, sit in commissions to distribute funds and evaluate the success of the programmes. As a result, they divide innovation funds among themselves in order to strengthen institutions that operate with old mind-sets. It would not be true to argue that innovation funds are always used to reinforce the status quo. There are exceptions, but they prove the rule.

- another group is actively working on new paradigm politics informed by New Renaissance ideas (a transpartisan political alternative that focuses on systemic change).

The latter group works primarily on intermediate solutions.

Intermediate solutions. The solutions mentioned in the eight examples (geopolitics, the economy, the financial system, energy, migration, education, technology and media) are mostly intermediate solutions: they work even if human beings are not (yet) conscious. In other words, they are steps that can be taken without requiring a new consciousness. These solutions are critical, because we cannot predict when people will become conscious, taking action out of insight.

There is no need to repeat the various intermediate solutions here, as they were discussed in the eight examples above. Catalysing the New Renaissance will require solutions inspired by systemic views. These solutions are not isolated, one-off, piece-meal interventions, but connected, long-term, holistic transformations.

Intermediate solutions are based on principles such as fiscal discipline, voluntary simplicity, social justice, human rights and ecological balance. Doing so means dealing with complex challenges. For instance,

- Fiscal discipline is difficult to uphold in a debt-based monetary system, where states have to accumulate debts or else the economy declines;
- Voluntary simplicity is a fringe phenomenon limited to a small percentage of the population, and there are currently no signs that it will attract large numbers anytime soon;
- Achieving social justice is not about increasing the size of the welfare state, but about changing welfare along with the economic system;
- Human rights is not just about having certain protections in law; it is about defence against infringements that endanger human rights even in democracies; and
- Moving toward ecological balance requires shifting deeply ingrained consumption patterns, energy systems, transport systems and industrial structures.

Root solutions. Root solutions is a new field of inquiry and therefore a field with relatively little information and experience. Root solutions are to a large extent non-empirical. One cannot measure them because they work on the inner dimensions, the deep spaces of the psyche, the fundamentals of human potential, that is, on the level of consciousness.

The logic of root solutions is as follows: Conscious individuals have an inner need to work in service of humanity. They cannot do otherwise than to support idealistic endeavours. It is a need growing out of consciousness. As people become more conscious, they feel this need and begin to act on it. They (co-)create solutions that are likely to be superior to those enacted out of lower consciousness. In this way, consciousness naturally generates action for the common good.

If this holds true, a two-pronged approach to problem solving can be applied: First, to develop intermediate solutions, which are not dependent on a change in consciousness, and secondly, to work on a change of consciousness that accelerates the development and realization of intermediate solutions.

What does it mean to work on a change of consciousness? Some indications were given in the section entitled "Consciousness" on page 6ff. Some further indications may be in order:

- 1) To work on a change of consciousness means starting with one's own person. It requires becoming aware of oneself (Gnothi seauton, Greek: γνῶθι σεαυτόν, "know thyself").

- 2) Becoming more conscious is a struggle against illusions and “evil” inside us. It is about developing humanity in the broadest sense of the word.
- 3) Becoming more conscious – and staying that way – is a daily training. It is a process of working on one’s character, addressing whatever is causing suffering to oneself or to others (dysfunctions, unhelpful patterns, negative feelings, etc.). It is a serious effort to engage with all aspects of life through self-awareness, self-development, and self-discipline.
- 4) Consciousness is about becoming observant of life.¹⁵
- 5) Consciousness is about helping people and helping the world.

As we move toward root solutions, work on personal development is the core. This applies to everyone, including to change makers fostering the New Renaissance. The more responsibility a person assumes, and the more influence this person has on society, the more the personal development work becomes essential. The personal and introspective dimensions of creating new society cannot be overestimated.

Cultural creatives struggle with similar character flaws, vanities and illusions as everyone else. Each change maker has his or her unique set of problems and challenges. It is even possible that some barriers are more common in cultural creatives than in the rest of the population. Let us suggest some of these barriers:

- believing to be on “the right path”;
- developing a missionary instinct around some partial wisdom;
- creating unreal worlds and forgetting about reality;
- assuming to be somehow more developed, more moral, etc.;
- judging people that are not following one’s path as being incomplete or underdeveloped;
- being disappointed that other people do not follow one’s brilliant ideas;
- developing expectations (“pay me because I am doing good work”, “praise and acknowledge my work”, “give me special status or privilege”, and so on);
- living only for one’s mission and forgetting about close people around;
- sticking with one’s goals and forgetting that these goals might evolve;
- not turning intentions to action or not finishing work that one has started;
- forgetting the basics of responsibility such as answering emails, paying one’s debts and keeping one’s promises.

In his book *Leadership is an Art*, Max DePree wrote: “When one thinks carefully about why certain people who are competent, well-educated, energetic, and well supported with good tools fail, it is often the red thread of superficiality that does them in. They never get seriously and accountably involved in their own work.” (1989, 136).

If we want to help Catalyse the New Renaissance, we need to place greater emphasis on:

- Working on oneself / one’s self;
- Living the vision we talk about;
- Learning from children;
- Going beyond self-centred patterns – doing whatever maximizes current utility;
- Stepping out of a “fog landscape” of vague ideas and unconscious impulses and stepping into one’s true vocation;
- Looking for friends with whom one shares a common task;

¹⁵ Josef Beuys once said: “Mysteria are happening at the main train station” (Beuys 1984). Life gives us a never ending sequence of opportunities to become more conscious. Life is the teacher and the occurrences are its teachings.

- Making and keeping commitments to oneself as well as others;
- Uniting words and actions;
- Emancipating from the entertainment culture, which dominates modern life, creating expectations that everything has to be joyful and fun.

The latter point is essential. On the one hand, elements of play, celebration and joy make the work for transition more bearable. It can be a way to sustain oneself for the long term and not burn out. On the other hand, the idea that catalysing the New Renaissance means to discover the sweet aspects of life, however one may define this, is an illusion. The expectation that a culturally creative life is full of pleasant emotions, or good states of mind, makes us vulnerable in times when life refuses to meet this expectation. Meaningful work does not automatically lead to a better life, more balance, happiness, harmony, love, etc. It may do so in the long run, but in the short run, it can be quite troublesome. Attempts to change the fundamentals of the “old order” is far from fun, as it faces fierce resistance, from inside and outside. If change makers never have any resistance, they might wish to ask themselves if they are doing the right thing.

The relationship between vocation and happiness is more complex than one might think. On first sight, it seems valid to argue that people should do things that bring them joy. In an ideal world, people would discover what they truly enjoy and they would experience the serious joy of doing what they are doing. But the question is: How to react if such ways are not found? What if we do certain things because they make sense, even if they do not give us pleasure? Should we give up, as soon as we are not satisfied, or should we work it through, even if it causes pain? The “hard” work, and the “boring” work, are necessary. It makes little sense to prioritize joy when seriousness of purpose is called for. Without long-term commitment and an ability to withstand pain, there is no achievement.

It is probably true that fundamental change often happens at the edge of lightness. But this is not a universal truth. In some cases, change also happens at the edge of darkness. Carl Jung ([reference](#)) said:

“There is no coming to consciousness without pain. People will do anything, no matter how absurd, in order to avoid facing their own Soul. One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious.” ([page](#))

Many people who brought humanity forward had a life of great suffering. Not all of them experienced depression, but many of them experienced suffering on the path of developing consciousness. Processes such as soul searching, friend searching, true partner searching, world searching and God searching are not always bright and pleasant. Jung expressed this very eloquently:

“Anyone who wants to know the human psyche will learn next to nothing from experimental psychology. He would be better advised to abandon exact science, put away his scholar’s gown, bid farewell to his study, and wander with human heart through the world. There, in the horrors of prisons, lunatic asylums and hospitals, in drab suburban pubs, in brothels and gambling-halls, in the salons of the elegant, the Stock Exchanges, socialist meetings, churches, revivalist gatherings and ecstatic sects, through love and hate, through the experience of passion in every form in his own body, he would reap richer stores of knowledge than text-books a foot thick could give him, and he will know how to doctor the sick with a real knowledge of the human soul.” ([page](#))

5. OUTLOOK

Humanity appears to be in a transition phase, a process emphasised by terms such as Great Transition, Great Turning and Great Transformation. The transition in the 21st century is marked by advanced levels of knowledge, yet at the same time also intellectual, moral and spiritual confusion. If one wants to understand the predicament of our era, and possible futures, we may observe how illnesses that are known as psychological illnesses are expressing themselves at the collective level, e.g. through

- 1) Distortions in the perception and interpretation of reality.
- 2) Behaviours that seem bizarre, but that are consistent with widely held perceptions and beliefs.
- 3) Symptoms such as incoherence, flattening of emotions, agitation, hostility and aggression, difficulties with problem solving, attention deficits, difficulties in managing relationships, lack of perspective, depression, self-harm, intense false beliefs (delusions), despair.

If we want to do something about the state of the world, a good starting point is to reflect upon ways of healing at the individual and collective level. For this, we need to bring together disciplines and professions that have been so far separate: for instance, psychology and medicine, education and healing, leadership and mental illness.

As many illnesses are psychosomatic, it makes sense to study medicine and psychology together. Likewise, it makes sense to educate children, youth and adults, with an awareness of learning difficulties and traumas. Catalysing the New Renaissance is a process of using the knowledge we have — and of bringing different knowledges together — to reach understanding and ultimately wisdom.

Current trends point toward profound changes in all domains – technology, media, demographics, migration, health, environment, energy, economy, education, politics, geopolitics, etc. Separately and jointly, these changes are hardly evolving in stable and coherent ways. If ongoing dynamics continue, it may become increasingly difficult to plan one's life. As the century progresses, the experience of a calm life, in comfort and security, may become the exception. This applies not only to the poor and the middle class, but increasingly also for those who are well off. Rich people can pay their way out of social disturbances by living in fenced communities. But they cannot avoid the overall state of society, nor the state of nature. Especially the rise of civilizational illnesses — including depression, heart disease, diabetes, obesity — affect all social strata.

We are living in an era of great uncertainty, confusion and loss of security. Much of what once seemed solid is melting in the air. Representative for a growing segment of society is the 18-year-old who jumped from a tower in the historical town of Olomouc. In her goodbye letter, she wrote: "I don't see any future. I love you all." She had none of the typical problems associated with suicide risk. On the outside, everything was alright. But on the inside she lived a life of quiet desperation. She could not cope with the uncertain outlook, the lack of meaning, the lack of hope for the future. Instead of dousing her anxiety in drugs, alcohol or virtual reality, like many members of her generation, she decided to end her life.¹⁶

While it is difficult to predict the upcoming changes, we can assume that they will be fractured, non-linear and discontinuous. The idea that the 21st century will be smooth sailing lacks understanding of current trends as much as historical awareness. Just like the 20th century experienced great tragedies, the 21st century is likely to experience its share of upheavals. Predictions assuming an extrapolation of

¹⁶ According to a study comparing the experiences and views of British teenagers in 1986 and 2006, the number of teenagers who say they have no best friend they can confide in has risen from around one in eight to almost one in five (Ward 2007).

the status quo are improbable, because the status quo is unsustainable. Much of the world is already in turmoil and it is only a question of time, before countries that are used to stability and a good standard of life will experience transformative pressures.

Currently, our planet still has “islands” of stability, but their number and size is likely to shrink. Upcoming changes are likely to affect all nations – those clinging to visions of economic growth, military domination and fossil fuels, as much as those practicing principles of fiscal discipline, voluntary simplicity, social justice, human rights and ecological balance. All nations are part of an evolving planetary political economy. In the global context, nations that fare better attract more migrants, contribute a greater share for bailouts, and pay more for damages caused to global public goods. There are many kinds of rebound effects and systemic intricacies that create a sense of uncertainty about future scenarios.

Development in the next decades will depend on how the complex tension evolves between forces seeking to maintain the status quo and those that seek to advance a paradigm shift and a change of consciousness. These are not just two groups, with promoters of the status quo on the one hand, and paradigm changers on the other hand. There is complex spectrum of individuals, with every possible shade and combination. Since individuals follow different developmental pathways during a lifetime, a “permanent” classification of status quo people and change makers is neither accurate nor useful.

More useful is the following perspective: Each human being on balance, over a lifetime, contributes more to one trend or the other: some contribute more to the status quo, and others more to a paradigm shift. There is no reason to expect that one group will gain the upper hand in the coming years. For this reason, we cannot expect a complete disintegration of society, nor a full scale renaissance. Most likely, the future will be characterized by *simultaneous processes of breakdown and breakthrough* with great local and regional differentiation. The processes of decay and reconstruction are already occurring in every community, in every institution, inside every human being. This was the case also in previous historical periods of transition, except that nowadays the level of complexity is much higher, the pace of change faster, and the number and scale of interrelated challenges greater.

Each challenge on its own might be manageable. With sufficient will, individual problems can be mitigated or solved. Problematic is the cumulative effect of all challenges and their volatile interaction. Given that successive generations of political leaders were not able to reverse the dystopian trends when they were arising within a context of relatively stable conditions, there is little reason to expect that current or future generations of leaders will achieve a turnaround. Even if they were to think and act differently than before, they now face a far greater range of problems than the previous generation of leaders.

Some authors have argued that we are living in times of super-diversity (e.g. Vertovec 2015), accelerating change (e.g. Wals & Corcoran 2012), and global systemic shift (e.g. Benedikter 2013). The institutions and systems in place today are so complex that even experts have difficulties to understand them, let alone manage them. To counter this trend, we need to think how to simplify our lives, as well as our institutions, to an extent where they become manageable.

The crises we observe today are signals of an epochal societal transformation comparable to agricultural sedentarisation and industrialisation. Given that our education systems do not sufficiently prepare individuals for this change, the question becomes how to accelerate and deepen the process of learning, enabling more people to become catalysts of transformative change.

While whole society solutions are difficult to tackle, solutions at smaller scales remain viable. Regardless of how societal conditions will evolve, there is always a next viable step for every individual, every family,

every community. Macro change can happen if there is a sufficient number of functioning micro environments. One of the core questions therefore is how to stimulate as many micro environments as possible to work on catalysing the New Renaissance, and how to make these environments spread and scale.

Many leaders, including those who influence them, and even large parts of the population, still believe in the “old world”, without realising that this world is no longer viable – neither financially, nor environmentally, nor socially, nor in any other way. Chris Martenson (2011:11) wrote that: “the reflexive response of those in power will be to rather defensively attempt to perpetuate the status quo ... [T]heir earnest attempts to conduct business as usual for another decade will unquestionably lead to a world of less prosperity, not more. If we pursue this policy of attempting to sustain the unsustainable, what we face is a future filled with scarcity, conflict, and diminished opportunities.”

The longer this process continues – the longer the “old world” is upheld – the more sudden and significant future adjustments will be. It is well known that managing symptoms, or fixing damages after they occur, is more expensive than prevention. Moreover, problems treated merely at the level of symptoms tend to come back with greater force.

The pressure exerted on individuals increase proportionally with the resistance to change. Individuals who do not want to develop and grow, who prefer to keep their old ways of thinking and living, are particularly vulnerable. Adjustments are bound to happen, either by choice or by circumstances. These adjustments will have an impact on the development of consciousness. The meaning of the term “apocalypse” is a process of revelation, the removal of the veil. It is a process of becoming more conscious, moving into a “larger space”, individually and collectively.

CONCLUSION

This paper focused on the concept of the New Renaissance and the underlying consciousness driving it. It reviewed the symptoms of crisis, the causes and the possible solutions in different spheres such as geopolitics, the economy, the financial sector, the energy system, the education system, migration, technological progress, and the media. A more comprehensive review would also treat the health care system, social welfare, criminal justice, the world of art and culture and other domains.

The objective is not just to describe problems, analyse causes and suggest possible solutions. The objective is to lay the groundwork for practical change, enabling concrete action that makes each of these societal subsystems healthier, more functional and more sustainable. The agenda for change is vast, and every single human being has opportunities to make a difference in their particular profession, organisation and community.

In this conclusion, we will not repeat the ideas presented in the paper, but synthesize the overall trends, and the choices for individuals. Perhaps the most fundamental choice is whether to be pro-active in terms of social change, or whether to do nothing. Pro-active choices can be outwardly oriented (in terms of change making activities in the external world) or inwardly oriented (in terms of consciousness work), or both. If emphasis is placed too much on either side, problems may arise. A person who focuses primarily on outside work is likely to get to a point where inner development is needed to catch up with outer development. On the other hand, a person who focuses strongly on inside work, without being active in terms of shaping the outside world, risks becoming self-centred over time.

Apart from these pro-active choices, there is also the choice to do nothing. The freedom to do nothing should be protected, because the alternative would be to overrule the free will of people. This would be a violation of the most fundamental principle of the New Renaissance, which is freedom.

We may ask how the world will look if doing nothing remains the primary choice for most people, most of the time. Looking into the future, we need to count with difficulties, including possible regress, especially in scenarios of crisis when survival instincts tend to overshadow human values.

The New Renaissance is a growing movement driven by cultural creatives from different walks of life. These people may not know each other personally, but they act based on similar ideas and similar goals. They favour more enlightened forms of leadership, but they are not waiting for virtuous leaders or “Philosopher Kings” to solve problems. The consciousness of leaders is usually not more advanced than the consciousness of the population. Therefore, instead of waiting for better leaders, every citizen can compensate for leadership vacuum or misguided leadership.

Since ancient times there have been attempts to reconstruct and regenerate society. Even in the darkest periods of history, there were people working for new beginnings. Often they were started by individuals or small groups. However, initial impulses were later taken up by wider and more diverse groups.¹⁷

¹⁷ Keep for this Czech version, as in many ways it is better than the English one: Pravidelně a odedávna se v lidstvu objevují ušlechtilé snahy o nápravu stávající situace a mnohé bylo v tomto směru vykonáno nebo započato. Většinou jsou tyto snahy vykonávány tzv. kulturně kreativními lidmi přicházejícími z různých směrů, z různých oblastí života a oborů činnosti. Spojuje je společná vůle k uskutečnění nového díla, které má přinést impulsy k proměně mnohdy již neživých či upadajících struktur. Jsou to impulzy přinášející nejen nový, ale i mnohem hlubší pohled na svět, člověka, naši planetu i vesmír. Jsme si však zcela vědomi toho, že sebeušlechtilější a sebetvořivější vůle člověka musí stát na pevných základech, jinak by se stala dalším z nerealizovatelných snů a utopií lidstva. Máme-li započít s proměnou vzdělávání a dalších oblastí společenského života, musí stát v našem zorném úhlu pohledu především člověk sám.

The same is happening with the New Renaissance impulse: a few decades ago, there were few people who forecast a whole-scale transformation in this century. In recent years, more and more people subscribe to this view. The first step is to imagine possible futures; the second step is to start preparing for these scenarios; and the third step is co-create the future. Co-creation is essential to the New Renaissance.

Many people nowadays are taking these three steps: firstly, they imagine possible futures for themselves, their loved ones, and beyond; secondly, they try to understand current trends and to prepare for the transformation; and thirdly, they actively shape the future through new projects, initiatives, organisations and communities. Many individuals and groups are working toward sustainable futures, for instance, by reducing debt, by founding new social enterprises and labs, by building friendships around shared ideals, by founding communities, by striving for increased self-sufficiency, by bringing up their children in natural ways, by building sustainable homes, and so on.

An abstract paper on what politicians (or others) should do to create a better world is beside the point. What matters is how *each of us* thinks and feels, what intentions we have, how we spend our time, who we choose as partners and friends, who we vote for, and what we actually do in our lives, individually and collectively. What matters is how far we go in imagining our visions, and how far we go in realizing them. If this paper inspires some individuals to do what is anyway already a need in their innermost self, it has accomplished its purpose. It has also accomplished its purpose if it gives confidence to change makers, showing that they are not alone in caring for the whole.

Many cultural creatives, even those who were so far in a passive waiting loop, sense a need to help improve conditions. The more the fabric of society is under strain, the greater are the incentives to do something. Only in highly repressive regimes it happens that people decide not to become involved in generating change, and even in such conditions there are exceptions, where people endanger their lives to stand up for what they believe in.

Taking consciousness seriously, we may ask the following questions: Are there useful actions that can be taken before human beings become conscious? What is the state of consciousness out of which proper action can grow? Once we take action, how can we avoid creating disharmony or suffering? Are we peaceful or do we have negative thoughts or feelings, which blur our consciousness? Do we appreciate others, or do we vilify them? Do we extend praise for what people do, or do we berate them for not doing enough?

In the future, we need to count with many New Renaissance definitions and orientations, bringing great diversity, but also confusion. New Renaissance movements may appear as PR gimmicks. Others will introduce ideas that are not compatible with freedom. Some people will be oriented by the original impulse. Others will have the (aware or unaware) aim to give it other directions, other meanings.

This is why a key aspect of New Renaissance thinking and action needs to be non-corruptibility. The forms of corruption can be subtle and include compromise, pragmatism, opportunism, inclusiveness and political correctness.

The New Renaissance impulse is a soft, peaceful and compassionate path, without extremist tendencies. It is radical only in the sense of the Latin word *radic-*, *radix root*. It searches for the root causes and root solutions. The New Renaissance is a countermovement to the proliferating fundamentalisms of our age. It is also a countermovement to the “middle road” — the mainstream options that many political parties and institutions offer. Just because extremism is wrong does not mean that the middle road is right. Increasingly, it seems that all of the available options are wrong, to a greater or lesser extent. If this is

so, a legitimate choice can be “none of the above”. A New Renaissance approach may be to combine elements of the existing options with completely new ideas in new, systemic ways.

In politics, we see that an increasing share of the voters do not feel allegiance to any of the existing parties and programmes, sensing that something truly new is needed. This need is understood by shrewd politicians who campaign on platforms of change.

The New Renaissance cannot be a mass movement, at least not initially. The logic of mass movements is not the creation of meaningful and profound content, but proselytization of simple slogans that appeal for some time to the masses. New models first need to be developed, then tried and tested.

The New Renaissance has started in a small, almost invisible way, limited at first to a small group of people. Recall the famous quote of Margaret Mead: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

While the New Renaissance started small, ultimately, it needs to spread and scale. It is not an undertaking by, and for, the cultural elite. The New Renaissance addresses all people. It includes all institutions and all organisations. It is a development vision for the community, the nation and the world. It is a cultural movement that can also become a political movement. New Renaissance politics is a cultured politics, *politics with the mind of wisdom*. It is a politics that does not feel attachment to past ideologies, parties or movements. It is a transpartisan politics that is not oriented by egoism but by the will to serve the common good.

The New Renaissance can grow in good times as much as in periods of profound psychological and spiritual disorientation. In fact, the New Renaissance is likely to strengthen with deterioration and crisis, because the latter will increase the pressure to generate change. In this sense, the New Renaissance can arise even in the darkest periods of illusion, decadence and greed. The main question is not “is this the right time?”, but “what can we do before we are conscious?” Because after we are conscious, the question what to do is much less shrouded in mystery.

HOW TO GET STARTED

At the beginning of an initiative, project or other change making endeavour, it is useful to clarify the preference of the team how to work. In what follows, we will present three basic approaches, using the lessons of experience gained in the preparation of the Krumlovia Project, an endeavour to create a Learning Village in the historical town of Český Krumlov:¹⁸

1) The **vision-based approach** is to “draw ideas from the future” and to enrich them in ever more coherent and profound ways, so that in the end all elements fit together, make sense together and reinforce each other. This approach means to increase the “density of ideas” and to refine them until the world “yields to their force”. This is the moment when money, interest and practical help flows in, and when implementation can start.

2) The **practical approach** is to engage in less up front planning and design and more emphasis on hands-on activities. For example, if the project is a Learning Village, a first step could be to organize courses, seeing what works and what does not, improving the education step by step, then gradually expanding from there. The practical approach does not exclude vision work. For instance, one could start

¹⁸ For more information about the Krumlovia Project, see Assenza & Molz 2015.

with a general vision of education (as the living core of the Learning Village), and then proceed to organising courses. Rapid prototyping will yield lessons that can be used to improve the education step by step. Once the educational programmes are running successfully, other dimensions of the Learning Village can emerge in a similar way. There would be general visions for architecture, law, economics, governance, etc., followed by practical activities.

3) The **integrated approach** brings vision and practice together. They can beautifully interact, if both understand the value of the other. The main risk of the integrated approach concerns clashing timelines. Practitioners are usually faster than visionary people who first want to think things through and create agreement around ideas. There can be tensions around these different timelines, and around different styles of working. Practitioners will be impatient with the visionaries and the visionaries point to various kinds of lapses that inevitably happen when one gets started without sufficient upfront work.

In our experience, the more complex a project, and the more it belongs to a new paradigm, the more upfront work is needed. The overall time is further prolonged the less examples there are to follow. In the Krumlovia Project, there was no example to follow, as we do not know of any ecovillage, which was designed from scratch as a system innovation that includes a new lifelong learning paradigm.

Preparatory work means working on content, but also on building the team, for example through biography work. In the Krumlovia Project, we often experienced problems when people thought that we had figured out enough to get started in practical ways, without actually knowing what to do, why, in which sequence, with whom, where, with what money, etc. The idea to start “somehow” based on a diffuse general agreement would lead to muddling our way through, hoping that in the end something great comes out of it. Someone once tried to count how many years a group of monkeys would take to write a work of Shakespeare if they hacked into a typewriter every day. The number of years is not expressible in terms of language.

There are strong arguments to remain in a vision-based approach until the vision has been thought through and described in sufficient detail. The lessons of experience in the Krumlovia Project so far showed the value of the vision-based approach. Our objectives were:

- To create the whole “temple” in thought and on paper before starting to put stones on top of each other.
- To ensure that our team, and our stakeholders, are on board with the whole idea, in all its complexity and beauty, not merely with a rough “impression” or some partial aspect.
- Not to act out of non-reflected impulses, but to act when we have thought it through and when we know what we are doing.
- To be credible toward the outside world. We did not want to say to the town, to potential investors or to the general public: “Here we have a preliminary urbanistic design, but we are actually not fully happy with it.” Or: “We have also some good ideas about education, law, economics and organization, but these are just drafts, nothing finished.” If we want to be credible to the outside world, we must be confident to say: “Here is how the project would work: Here’s how education would work; here is how it can be accredited; here is the urban study, here is the architecture, here is the organization, the finances, the law.” It is critical that every member of the team stands firmly behind the overall design.
- To work toward a finished design that enables us to present it to all stakeholders and improve it based on external feedback, and based on lessons from experience after we start implementation.
- To present a clear and holistic design as a defence against attempts to lower the quality, or to deflect the project in various directions. For instance, one former member of the team wanted

to create an education relying almost completely on project-based learning, which is merely one out of many good approaches.

- On the basis of a clear overall design, to develop the synthesis required for a business plan that investors need to provide funding. It makes little sense to look for money if we are not fully clear ourselves what exactly the money should be used for, who has what role in the team, etc.

The practical and the vision approach are not opposites:

Firstly, a vision is the most practical thing, because when something is created in thought, and it is profound and substantial, it is already a reality. The placing of stones to build the Learning Village, is visceral and palpable already in the stage of thought. Thoughts are just as real as any other reality. As long as we are not finished with thinking the Krumlovia Project through, we should not be surprised that in reality nothing moves.

Secondly, practical work cannot proceed without vision. There is always some idea, intuition or gut feeling that guides one's actions. The question is only if this vision, and the resulting action, is adequate to the objectives set by the team.

Before choosing the vision-based approach, the team should clarify their preferences in terms of approach. In the Krumlovia Project, most team members are practitioners who enjoyed discussing and working with documents, but not for years. They lost motivation when they could not get started working with people in the actual implementation. In team discussions, the point was often raised that we should engage in practical activities, but no one took responsibility for it. The lesson is that those who call for "practical activities" have a duty to start them.

In the Krumlovia Project we did not switch to a "practice-based approach" partly because no one took the lead, and partly because there are risks. Many great projects failed because they were "hurrah-actions" creating initial enthusiasm, but later revealing divisions in the team, with various people dragging in different directions. In principle, one could establish an entire learning village in this way, but it would be extremely difficult. Here's why: All questions that a visionary approach deals with prior to implementation would have to be decided under stress, while the target group is "hungry in the kitchen". It is very difficult to implement a project, focusing on operations, and at the same time do the time-intensive content work to ensure that the project remains profound and coherent. The Krumlovia Project team experienced this in a pilot project, the *School for Transformative Leadership* at Palacky University. During project implementation in 2011-2013, we were so busy with contracts, time sheets and other practicalities, that we had no time and energy to think about content.

Let us imagine for a moment what would happen if we got into practice after late 2014 when about 50% of the overall preparatory and visioning work was completed. Sooner or later, people would start doing things which are not coherent. Then somebody would say "stop, this makes no sense". The people who are stopped would get frustrated. Then we would have meetings to work out the frustration, along with content and procedure. Everyone would want their views to be heard. There would be power struggles over direction. The implementation schedule would be delayed. People would get even more frustrated. And in the end the project implodes.

In order to prevent anarchy, a practical approach would require a very strong manager-visionary who keeps the team together and on course. Anyone who has ever led a new paradigm project knows how difficult it is

- to keep an emerging endeavour without funding on track and alive over several years.

- to attract other competent people when there is one central personality who holds the whole effort. With a central personality “filling the room”, there is not enough space for others to bring themselves in. As a result, the effort remains small, fragile, teetering on the verge of collapse.

This is why we decided to design the Krumlovia Project with a different form of leadership: a roundtable, where every member holds the whole endeavour, and where the “leader” is only needed if the team cannot find consensus. This is why we needed to be clear about what we want before we set out in terms of practical activities.

In a roundtable of collective leadership, no one tells anyone what to do. Everything is based on free will. If someone says “I will do something”, then the promise should be kept. In the Krumlovia Project, we used to write promises in our meeting reports. Many of these promises were not kept. Our lesson for future projects is that there should be no more promises and no declarations of loyalty if they are not meant seriously and if they are not adhered to. It is better to say “I am sorry, I cannot do this” than to say, for instance, “I promise to meet every month to work on the content” and then not do it.

In fact, it is not about loyalty to the project; it is about loyalty to ourselves, i.e. the agreements we made already before birth, and the commitment we have taken on. It is a great pity to start something and not to finish it. The Krumlovia Project is on hold since 2015, but it will hopefully be revived when the team gets ready to make another effort at completing the design, followed by preparation of materials for fundraising.

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Acknowledgements

This research was realised in the framework of the TÁMOP 4.2.1.D-15/1/KONV-2015-0006 - The development of the innovation research base and knowledge centre in Kőszeg in the frame of the educational and research network at the University of Pannonia key project, which is subsidised by the European Union and Hungary and co-financed by the European Social Fund.

We are grateful to Monika Brusenbauch Meislová and Vladimír Lobotka for their editorial work and ideas that were implemented in the paper; a heartfelt “thank you” goes also to Zuzana Ledvoňová for her insightful comments.