Governance, Science–Policy Interfaces, Societal Organisation and the Transition to an Ecosystemic Model of Culture

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Reviewing the latest global challenges, evidence shows that the dominant paradigms of knowledge, development, wealth, power, growth, work and freedom, embedded into the political, economic, social, cultural and educational institutions, favour the dominant political-technological-economical paradigms, associated with a perverse system of production and consumption, energy squander, deforestation, mining expansion, hazardous wastes, pesticides, pollutants, degraded and violent urban centers, global climate change, diminishing biological diversity.

Contemporary problems stem from the prevailing power-driven ethos and anomic individualism, which diverts human concern into unlimited material consumption and production, technological invention and scientific advancement, whatever the circumstances and consequences may be. More critical than individual motives and morals, quality of life, creation of choices, development of capacities and motivations, depend on incentive structures, of the prevalent ethos present in the cultural, social, political and economical institutions

In our asymmetrical societies, large differences in power between natural and legal persons, allow considerable influence of dominant groups over State affairs and regulatory agencies. Could "civil society", academic or societal organizations, often paying too little attention to the interactions of power, politics and agency, be effective against forces too powerful to succumb to a direct attack, in a context of asymmetric relations? How to face corporations powerful lobbies, the tacit consensus among public officials on "how to handle things", in view of the prevailing political and economic interests?

Trying to solve isolated and localized problems without addressing the general phenomenon is a conceptual error[1]. To face the problems of difficult settlement or solution in the world, science–policy interface should overcome conventional public policies, segmented academic formats, market-place interests and mass-media headlines, which accommodate people to the prevailing order, instead of preparing them to carry meaning, purpose and life-enhancing values (relational and ontological), to the individual and collective projects of life.

Societies demarcated by weakening social bonds, a low degree of integration and common values, are unable to decide on the "technological solutions" delineated by the establishment, that bind nature with financial interests, ignoring social, cultural and

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[1] Policy makers and researchers – disregarding the profound epistemological and ontological issues at stake – have adopted structuralist approaches, with their stress on institutions and institution building, failing to account for the design, formation and maintenance of institutions, encompassing the role of leaders, elites and coalitions and the general patterns of institutional failure or corruption (Leftwich, 2010).

environmental impacts; advocacy, public policies, research and teaching programmes, that usually deal with fragmented, reduced, taken for granted issues (the "bubbles" on the surface), should define and deal and with the problems deep inside the "boiling pot", where they emerge.

Global climate change, diminishing biological diversity, desertification, overspread pollution are coupled with a perverse system of production and consumption, energy squander, agri-business deforestation, expansion of cattle raising land, massive insecticide use, dumping of hazardous wastes, real estate interests, linked to profit-seeking and capital accumulation, which are usually sold to the public as "development" projects, transforming people in mere users and consumers, rather than critical citizens committed to the common good.

Anthropogenic views (the "human-influenced age"), do not distinguish between the whole of the human beings and the destructive action on nature and culture of the political-economic establishment; power asymmetries should be considered, that confer to a small and privileged part of the world population the decisions about the destiny of the entire mankind. Offsetting proposals only mitigate a situation here and there, but do not address the causes of the problems continuously re-created within the system (like corruption that involves state capture).

The focus should not be on humankind, but on the political-economic-cultural system and its components, on its institutional embeddedness, on the marketing and advertising impact of mass-media on public opinion about products, services and lifestyles, challenging the mass-market mind-set which favours producing costly things that people do not need (luxury products, military hardware, pollution, traffic jams, useless chattels and widespread corruption and criminality), instead of what they need for a better quality of life (healthy food, adequate shelter, education, security, health care).

Public policies, advocacy, educational efforts need an integrated, ecosystemic approach to design, develop and assess the processes that could enable individuals, groups and society at large to deal with the problems of difficult settlement or solution in the world, in view of the weight of asymmetric power relations, accepted life styles and current paradigms of development, growth, power, wealth, work and freedom on the quality of life, the environment and the state of the world. The question encompasses socio-cultural learning niches, policy makers, market-place and vested interests in different areas: military, economic, political, educational, cultural (media arts, entertainment).

Instead of taking current prospects for granted and project them into the future (exploratory forecast), science–policy interfaces programmes should emphasize the definition of desirable goals and the exploration of new paths to reach them, in view of a set of values, norms and policies that prioritizes socio-ecological objectives and human well-being, the quality of natural and built environments and the aesthetic and ethical values linked to a moral and cultural meaning of the existence (normative forecast, "backcasting")[2] .

The dynamic field of events encompassing the forms of being in the world, the transition to an ecosystem model of culture, encompasses heterogeneous attributes, behaviours and interactions of individuals and the dynamics of the systems in which they live (institutions,

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[2] Backcasting is a planning method that starts with defining a desirable future and then works backwards to identify policies and programs that will connect that specified future to the present. According to a recent United Nations document, contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals should be in line with international standards and be accessible and transparent; the results should be actively and broadly shared, and used as a platform for dialogue on changes needed to achieve greater impact and responsiveness, enabling meaningful, full and effective participation of civil society in decision-making processes. Stakeholder engagement in long-term sustainable development works best if it is organized as a continuous, structured process, rather than on an ad-hoc basis or through unrelated one off engagement exercises at different points of the policy cycle; this means having the inclusion and/or engagement of specific sectors or citizen groups directly as a key component of the partnership approach (UN-NGLS, 2017).

populations, political, economic, cultural and ecological background), an array of factors that could add positive or negative value to the quality of the environment, the equity and the interactions between people and ecosystems, according the emphasis given to "eco-centric policies" versus "mass production policies" (Gorobets, 2014).

The development and evaluation of teaching programmes, research projects and public policies should contribute for the transition from a non-ecosystemic to an ecosystemic model of culture, taking into account, in the diagnosis and prognosis of the events, the configurations formed by the ensemble of the four dimensions of being in the world (intimate, interactive, social and biophysical), as they combine to elicit and change the events; in this sense, it is expected that advocacy, public policies, research and teaching programmes would:

1) define the problems in the core of the "boiling pot", instead of reducing them to the bubbles of the surface (effects, fragmented, taken for granted issues);

2) combine all dimensions of being in the world in the diagnosis and prognosis of the events, assessing their deficits and assets, as donors and recipients;

3) promote the singularity of (identity, proper characteristics) and the reciprocity (mutual support) between all dimensions in view of their complementarity and dynamic equilibrium;

4) contribute for the transition to an ecosystemic model of culture, as an essential condition for consistency, effectiveness and endurance.

All dimensions of being-in-the-world (intimate, interactive, social and biophysical) should be considered, as they combine to induce the events (deficits/assets), cope with the consequences (desired/undesired) and contribute for changes (potential outputs): dimensions' deficits and assets should be assessed, connections strengthened and ruptures sealed, as all dimensions evolve as donors and recipients, in terms of their dynamic equilibrium, complementarity and mutual support (Pilon, 2016).

The facts can not speak for themselves: politics and persuasion are essential to science: beyond generating new knowledge, contended values, social, cultural and economic constraints should be faced, empowering people to explore new scenarios and information relevant to achieve outcomes, enabling groups and individuals in the socio-cultural learning niches to develop new action pathways, "blurring the boundaries between academic disciplines, research, policy, and practice, and between states, markets, and society" (Leith, et al., 2017).

The ecosystemic approach favours the development of healthy societies, that invest in each other rather than in mega-projects with intensive use of resources, it extends to environmental problems, quality of life and the state of the world a larger conceptual framework that includes ontological and epistemological issues, in view of the isomorphy and transfers of concepts, laws and models in various fields; it relates to how taken for granted worldviews, values and perceptions affect the definition and treatment of the problems by public policies, research and teaching programmes in the world.

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