

“Conceptualising whole-of-society transformation – The model of Deep Institutional Innovation for Sustainability and Human Flourishing”

16th International Sustainability Transitions Conference, Lisbon, 24-26 June 2025

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The Polycrisis/Metacrisis

DIIS/DSIS holds that the climate crisis cannot be considered as a problem in isolation but must be addressed in tandem with the myriad of other crises humanity is facing

Metacrisis: Highlights the ethical dimensions of the crisis

- **Van Peborgh (2024) defines the metacrisis as a**
- **‘profound crisis of meaning’**
- **‘characterized by our inability to comprehend and navigate the complexities of the modern world’**
- **‘underscores a deeper crisis of separation and relationships, highlighting the urgent need to ...restore a sense of interconnectedness’.**



Polycrisis: Recognition of the interconnectedness of the problems faced by global society



Biodiversity loss, mass extinction, migration, war, inequality and climate change



Innovation in Deeply Interconnected Societal Institutions

DIIS builds on the Multi-level Perspective (Geels, 2023; 2011) and Deep Transitions (Kanger and Schot, 2019) framing and asserts the need to move beyond socio-techno system change to innovation in six interconnected societal institutions:

- **Economics**
- **Politics**
- **Technology**
- **Education**
- **Religion**
- **Gender**

The DIIS model thus posits the possibility of capturing irreversible transformational change through a fundamental reimagining of the key social institutions that together comprise contemporary societies



Political-economic- technological modernity

Represents a powerful constraint on innovation towards greater sustainability and human flourishing

That the structures and values of the landscape of industrial modernity as per Deep Transitions (Kanger and Schot, 2019) framing are actively contributing to the polycrisis/metacrisis is displayed through a discussion of

- **Corporate-Financial-State power**
- **Fossil Fuel Financing**
- **Online Technologies**



Corporate-Financial-State Power

- Concentration of power in the hands of corporations emanating from domination of capital
- Affording influence over policy and legislation
- Financial institutions possess power to decide which innovations to finance
- Real politics increasingly takes place within this system with citizens largely excluded
- EU Competitiveness Compass – Type of innovation supported encourages growth of corporate and financial power
- EU innovation paradigm is heavily focused on socio-techno system change and rooted in the values of industrial modernity
- EU economic policy as an unconvincing case of business as usual



Fossil Fuel Financing

- Fossil Fuels – Main driver of climate change
- Significant contributor to biodiversity loss, pollution and other harms
- UN Secretary General (2023) – Fossil fuel production is ‘incompatible with human survival’
- IPCC estimate that removal of fossil fuel subsidies alone would result in a 1-10% reduction in global emissions by 2030
- International commitments to the phasing out of fossil fuel subsidies have not been met. Subsidies reached an all time high of \$7 trillion in 2022 as a direct result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine
- Russia has weaponized energy resulting in an energy crisis
- Majority of subsidies are implicit yet serve to maintain the status quo and hinder the world’s ability to limit temperature rise



Online Technologies and the Undermining of Democracy

- **Decline of democracy internationally has accelerated sharply since 2016**
- **April 2025 – 5.31 billion social media identities – Average 19 hours per week on social media platforms**
- **Online technologies play a role in mainstreaming far right ideology and actors**
- **Social media algorithms have been shown to propagate far right messages – push users towards far-right content via recommendation algorithms**
- **Mass spread of misinformation is also a function of the algorithm system of social media**
- **“Misinformation and disinformation about political campaigns harm democracy because people lose trust in the political system. The real threat of algorithms is that they can amplify and magnify biases that already exist in the world” (Shin, 2024)**
- **“Posting, liking and sharing are consumerist practices that intensify the narrative crisis...We buy sell and consume narratives and emotions. Stories sell. Storytelling is storyselling” (Han, 2024)**



Reimagining Innovation

These three facets of actually existing political-economic-technological modernity display the limits the current paradigm places on innovation, constraining societal transformation and progress towards sustainability and human flourishing

These examples identified the need for

- A shift from a techno-optimist narrative to an ecological narrative
- Policy supporting renewable energy over fossil fuels coupled with innovative alternative policy
- Stronger regulation of online technologies

Such transformation necessitates a

- A paradigm shift
- A deep reimagining of innovation

The DIIS model envisions such a reimagining as

- A move beyond socio-technical system change to transformation of the six societal institutions included in the DIIS model
- Involving a novel transdisciplinary narrative of transformation based on three theoretical foundations



The Neolithic

- A template for social organisation that is sharply hierarchical in nature (Badiou, 2022)
- Top of the hierarchy – increasingly small number of people possess a concentration of wealth and power
- Centre of the hierarchy – middle class submit to the elite in return for rewards in terms of adequate prosperity and security
- This buy in of the middle class is essential to the maintenance of the system
- Bottom of the hierarchy – majority of people-impoverished, powerless and exploited
- Disparities in wealth and social status are by design of the system
- How can we imagine beyond the Neolithic and towards more horizontal and just patterns of societal organisation?



Escaping the Neolithic Partnership Systems and Fractals

Eisler and Fry (2019) - social systems lie on a continuum between domination systems and partnership systems

Domination systems:

- rigid top-down rankings
- cultural acceptance of abuse and violence

Partnership systems:

- democratic and egalitarian values and social practices
- cultural rejection of abuse and violence
- equal status between genders

Fractals are 'self-similar patterns that repeat across many scales, such that small parts of an object look similar to the whole' (O'Brien et al., 2023)

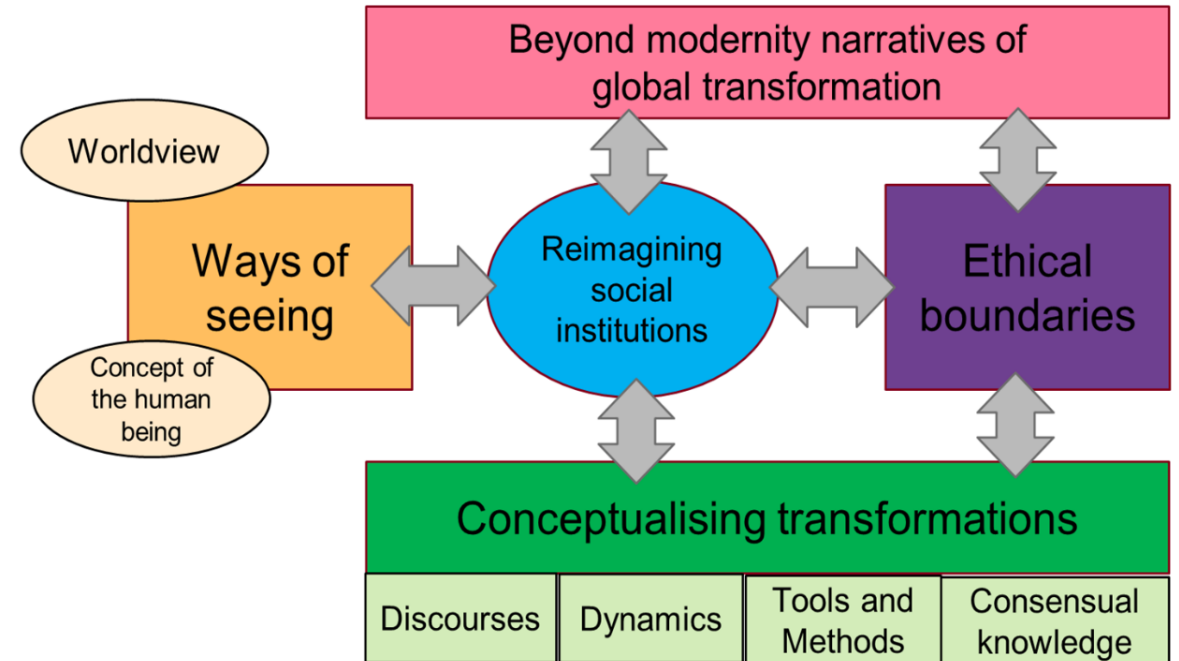
The fractals approach to scaling transformations sees 'scaling through a quality of agency based on values that apply to all, such as oneness and integrity' which can theoretically enrich the multi-level perspective (Geels, 2023; 2011) and compensate for the lack of agency in the model



The DIIS generative model for global ethical transformation

Innovation in six key societal
institutions guided by clear ethical
boundaries and inspired by the
worldview of Homo Curans

- Economics
- Politics
- Technology
- Education
- Religion
- Gender



Ethics of Care and Ethical Directionality

DIIS sees the path to sustainability and human flourishing as one that transforms our current society based on dominance values to one imbued with partnership values

Ethics of care (Lynch, 2022; Held, 2006)

- Calls for a society ordered not by preoccupations of self-interest and economic gain, but the development of a culture that enables and enriches human life
- A caring society that prioritizes the tasks of bringing up children, educating its citizens, providing adequate health care, meeting the needs of all, achieving peace and safety and caring for the environment
- Aims to overturn the entrenched gender hierarchy and to strengthen society against the rise of toxic authoritarian leaders

Ethical Directionality

- Opens paths for action, while at the same time leaving space for democratic, autonomous contestations and local transformative practice
- Inspires cooperative values and patterns to be initiated, or reproduced, throughout the whole of society



Homo Curans

**At the heart of this narrative is Homo Curans
– the human who cares**

Homo Curans values:

- **Interdependence**
- **Care**
- **Ecological reciprocity**
- **Emotional well-being**
- **Cultural belonging**
- **Spiritual purpose**
- **Community cohesion**

The values of Homo Curans inspire narrative transformation and ethical directionality of transformation leading to sustainability and human flourishing



Transformations of Social Duality

Dualities are historically sedimented, structurally reproduced, and affectively internalized

- state/market,
- human/nature,
- global/local,
- self/other
- domination/partnership

Transformation of entrenched dualities is necessary to enable deep cultural and institutional transformation for sustainability and human flourishing

- Structural negotiation
- Prefigurative practices – lived enactment of desired futures in the present (Cloughjordan ecovillage, Tipperary, Ireland)
- Peaceful protest

Offer forms of engagement for Homo Curans where social dualities can be transformed and deep institutional innovation enacted



Future Research

DIIS/DSIS is generative model and must remain in dialogue with other models of transformation

In order for the DIIS model to be of practical effect it must be rendered into strategic action steps, policy instruments, and institutional practices

Future research will build practical applications, policy entry points, and governance innovations on the basis of DIIS principles

