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Thesis Title: Into the Heart of Systems Change

Overview

This PhD research is the culmination of 20 years of personal and professional inquiry and practice of moving deeply into the Heart of Systems Change. The initial questions for this research began 20 years ago while living in Australia and learning from the Australian Aborigines about their cosmological understandings of the nature of reality and the foundations for an ecologically sustainable world. Through this inquiry it became clear that the lenses through which to explore these deeper questions can either provide new understanding and societal innovation for co-creating a world that works, or else becomes the biggest hindrance to stopping the worst-case scenario - irreversible ecological collapse. The earlier mechanistic paradigm - of parts and particles, isolated and random events, and a dualistic perception of the nature of reality and the role of humanity - has brought us into the very mess we now find ourselves trapped. Our current climate change crisis and eco-genocide is only a symptom of a much deeper underlying systemic problem of societal and human development on foundations that are not conducive for Life to thrive.

A new and more holistic scientific paradigm is now starting to emerge that enables and empowers us to systemically explore these deeper foundations of our sustainability and ecological thriving. This PhD research aims to contribute to this emerging new field via peer-reviewed international co-authored publications. These publications include the following co-authors: Prof Alexander Laszlo, Prof Pim Martens, Dr Jude Currivan, Dr Kurt Barnes, Dr Ad Smitsman, Dr. Gilberte C.K. Chung, and Dr Pavel Luksha. It also draws on in-depth interviews and conversations with, among others, Nora Bateson (the daughter of Gregory Bateson), Jean Russell, Dr Daniel C. Wahl, Joe Brewer, Dr Jean Houston, Judith Rosen, Chief Phil Lane, Sheri Herndon, Dr Lawrence Bloom, and others.

Into the Heart of Systems Change is also an exploration into the barriers that emerge from within the mechanistic systems requiring systemic transformational change for our collective sustainability. These barriers became apparent in three case-studies of four schools and two businesses that are included in the experimental action-research components of this PhD. In each of these case-studies, specific transformational strategies have been designed, applied, and tested over a period of several years to better understand systemic transformational change processes in conventional systems. The PhD research shows how these conventional systems are the offspring of a systemic change process that resulted from a predominantly mechanistic stance and worldview, which started around the time of the agricultural revolution. This stance and mechanistic practice, in contrast with our earlier indigenous worldviews, became further institutionalized during the last industrial revolution and has given rise to many of our current modern systems.

The publications that are part of this PhD research show how these mechanistic systems have an in-built polarization effect due to their lack of reciprocal relationship and co-coherence with our planetary ecosystems. As we became less responsive to the feedback from our planetary ecosystems, this polarization effect grew stronger. Instead of adapting to and evolving with the ecosystems we formed part of, we imposed a different order onto these systems to suit our growing economic needs. As we are now on the brink of our own civilizational collapse, we are also in the process of a major collective birthing process. This process is not a smooth ride and even with the best of intentions, we are still not able to safeguard where we need to go to avoid wide-scale systemic collapse. This PhD research offers new lenses, maps, and ways to navigate through this process, and most of all inspires that we live into the deeper questions together of what it means to go *Into the Heart of System Change* for a World and Future where all can thrive and flourish together.

Publications & Interviews as part of this PhD research:

- Smitsman, A & Chung C.K.C. (2018). Mauritius: Theory and Practice of Education for Sustainability. In Letchamanan, H & Dhar, D. (Eds.). *Education in South Asia and the Indian Ocean Islands*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Smitsman, A., Laszlo, A. & Barnes, K. (2018). Attracting our Future into Being: The Syntony Quest. *World Futures: The Journal of New Paradigm Research*. DOI: 10.1080/02604027.2018.1499850
- Smitsman, A., Martens, P. & Laszlo, A. (2019). The Polarization Effect: Healing our Worldviews. *Systema* 2019, Vol 7 (1). <http://www.systema-journal.org/article/view/414>
- Smitsman, A. & Currivan, J. (2019). Systemic Transformation - Into the Birth Canal. *Systems Research and Behavioral Science* (January 2019), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sres.2573> .
- Smitsman A. & Smitsman A.W. (2019). Ecological Perspectives of Human Development. [In review].
- Smitsman, A., Laszlo, A. & Luksha, P. (2019). Evolutionary Learning Ecosystems for Thrivable Futures - Crafting and Curating the Conditions for Future-fit Education [in review - World Futures].
- Smitsman A. (2019). Into the Heart of Systems Change [forthcoming].
- Youtube link for interviews: <https://goo.gl/51uRMd>