

From societal stupidity to the
future based on wisdom
enhancing ties between
individuals

Catastrophic trends

- The perils we know so well but want to forget:
 - Climate change
 - General pollution
 - Species loss
 - Nuclear war
- Hopeless situation?
- Perhaps hope outside the customary thinking

Why?

- Culprits: Individual human beings, the other people, their behaviours?
 - Humans stupid?
 - Do they want their own destruction?
 - No
 - Don't they know about the catastrophic trends?
 - Yes, they know.
 - Don't they see the consequences of their actions?
 - Yes, they see.
 - Opinion polls etc.

Well being?

- Do people regard the present state of the world so good that they are ready to continue at the risk of a catastrophe?
- No:
 - Not this kind of trading
 - The situation is not so good for the majority and not improving

Why do they continue?

- Many try to change their private life to some extent.
- Feeling of powerlessness and futility
- Adjustment
 - Trying to forget the reality
 - Or believing that we are anyway doomed
 - Mainstream culture helping in this adjustment

Why then?

- If the reason for catastrophic trends is not the stupidity of individuals, then what?
- Natural answer: society. But in what sense?
- Often a social explanation goes like this:
 - There are social structures that give a lot of power to a certain group of individuals.
 - The interest of this powerful group is to do A
 - Therefore A happens
- In many cases this type of explanation is valid
 - Not in this case: it is not in the interest of power wielders to destroy the earth as we know it

The stupidity of the system

- Society is *sui generis*, it is its own form of existence, emerging from the interaction between humans but not reducible to its constituent parts
- A society can be stupid or wise irrespective of whether the people in it are stupid or wise
 - It can be far more stupid than humans
 - This is common experience in a small scale:
 - the stupidity of bureaucracies

Privatized bureaucracies

- Now our societies are more bureaucratic than ever
- It is not generally noticed: most bureaucracies are private: insurance companies, banks, other big corporations
 - Graeber, David (2015): *The Utopia of Rules, On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy*.
- → Society as a whole is stupid

Digital bureaucracies

- The other reason why the almost total bureaucratization of our societies is not noticed: it is computer assisted
- One of the main reasons why computers were developed: to make possible maintaining ever increasing bureaucracies
 - Weizenbaum, Joseph (1976): *Computer Power and Human Reason, From Judgement to Calculation.*

Why bureaucracies are stupid?

- People are made to behave like machines:
 - According to rules and orders coming from above
 - Most human capabilities are excluded
 - Society = mega machine (Lewis Mumford: *The Myth of the Machine* I and II, 1967 and 1970)
- Intelligence is used only narrowly
 - Independent thinking is discouraged
- All the information available is not expected to be used
- Local knowledge is disregarded

The utopia of control

- Counterargument: bureaucracy can be wise because the people on the top can be wise?
- Yet the top cannot absorb and handle the enormous amount of information that is coming from all corners of society
- Therefore it is impossible for the top to make sensible value judgements concerning
 - the relevance of various factors
 - the fair treatment of various persons
- → small stupidities all along

Suppressing the resistance

- Small stupidities and the subjugation of people on the lower levels generates many kinds of resistance, visible and invisible
- → The main task: suppressing the resistance = maintaining and fixing the social machinery
 - Responding to the needs of machinery
- Wise adaptation to the non-social systems – if it happens at all – is subordinated to serve the main task
- → big stupidity

What about “markets”?

- What is meant: monetary nexus between people
- Another mega machine: parallel and intertwined with the previous one
- In fact this the view of the currently popular neoclassical economics: research on social mechanics with the tools of classical physics
 - Not regarded as a problem
- It is also the view of Marx:
 - Regarded as a big problem

Information blockage

- The prevailing theory: markets are wonderful information transmitting and gathering tools
- In reality: markets are transmitting and gathering information only very narrowly:
 - Only about paid monetary costs and profits earned in the production chain
 - Not non-monetary costs, not monetary costs paid by outsiders
 - Most of the relevant information cannot influence the decisions
 - → big stupidity

Global society = mega machine

- Two mechanism: bureaucracy and markets
- Like a stupid big machine or a Juggernaut
- → very simple models can map the behaviour of the society on the macro level
 - Statistical physics
 - The same behaviour although the beings in the model are extremely simple
 - The witnessed climate change of the recent decades has been possible to “forecast” (hindcast) on the data of the 1950's by a simple heat engine model

The collapse of ancient civilizations

- Perhaps the social stupidity is one reason for the collapse of many ancient civilizations
- Enormous bureaucracies
 - → certain type of complexity
 - Complexity regarded as the cause of the collapse (Joseph Tainter)
- Also monetary nexus was widespread

Can there be a wise society?

- It is generally thought that a small community can act wisely: “People put their heads together.”
- Also networks
- Both can be even wiser than any of their individual members
 - A wide spectrum of sensitivities and knowledge available from the members
 - Direct democracy: the lack of domination →
 - free, adequate and reciprocal communication
 - The unforced force of the better argument – deliberative democracy

On a large scale?

- Impossible?
- The idea how to do it has been among us for a long time:
 - Confederation of directly democratic small entities
 - The delegates to have imperative mandate
 - No mechanism of coercive rule
 - No such army or police force that a small elite could use to enforce obedience from the majority
 - → The top heavily dependent on the grassroots
 - The sensibilities of all would have an impact

In reality

- Among indigenous people
 - Iroquois confederacy, Haudenosaunee
- The society that has appeared in the beginning of many revolutions
 - E.g. here in Hungary in 1956
 - In 12 days a council system was created with 2100 councils on every instances of society: for ecample works, neighbourhood, local, district, revolutionary and soldiers' councils
 - Hannah Arendt soon after (1961): The council system is “the lost treasure of the revolutionary tradition”

Building structurally wise societies today

- Yet the tradition is not so lost
- Also in many recent revolutions building a confederacy of directly democratic face-to-face communities started
 - Spontaneously or because the tradition was known
- For example Argentina 2001
 - Neighbourhood assemblies, piqueteros communities, occupied workplaces, moneyless exchange
 - A part of this exists up to this day

Democratic confederalism in Rojava

- 2011 revolution begins in Rojava, northern Syria where Kurds are the majority
- The basic unit a commune: 30-150 families
 - In 2015 about 4000
- Next levels: a district or a village, a city or a group of villages, a canton
- Dual chairmanship on every level: woman and man
- Separate women's councils on every level

Wisdom in the shadow

- But what about here and now – all this utopia?
- Fortunately organizing society as mega machine only partially successful
- Society and people in it are fractured, full of cleavages
- There is another world in the shadow
 - Circles of friends, informal economy, movements
 - Organizing according to different principles within and outside official organizations
 - Wisdom enhancing relationships