

Taking the perspective of the Third. A contribution to the origins of systems thinking

Ao.Univ.Prof.i.R. Dr.phil. Wolfgang Hofkirchner
GSIS – The Institute for a Global Sustainable Information Society
Steinbrechergasse 15
1220 Vienna

Systems thinking is thinking in hierarchies, which means there are at least two levels (the level of the elements and their interaction and the level of the organisational relations of the system) and from one level to the next there is a qualitative leap. This qualitative leap has to do with the emergence of the (state of the) higher level from the (state of the) lower one – the lower builds a necessary condition but is not sufficient to yield the higher one, the higher one cannot be reduced to the lower one.

Epistemologically, a true generalisation is thinking in hierarchies. You have an object level on which different elements appear in their diversity and you have a meta-level on which the unity of the elements appears because of the system's relations. The latter appearance is an emergent of the human cognition process, which cannot be represented by deductive reasoning. A true generalisation is an act of leaping from empirical data to a theoretical insight.

It shall be argued that this capacity of human individuals was enabled by a new step of social co-operation – the advent of true social systems (societies) in anthropo(socio)genesis in which dyadic social systems (interaction of individuals that know each other) began to become nested in triadic social systems (interaction of individuals that need not to know each other). At this stage of evolution of humanity, the interaction of individuals is mediated via social relations as a Third. These social relations (culture, morals) allow individuals to distance themselves from society and to take the perspective of the whole of society and, thus, to understand what society expects from her and what she can expect from another individual.

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