

Good morning, everybody! Dear participants, colleagues and friends – a happy welcome to our Talks for a common future – a common future for humanity, for the planet and for civilisation! My name is Wolfgang Hofkirchner, I'm director of GSIS.

Let me first **thank you all** for making this event possible:

- All of you did so in that you showed your interest and registered for our event. We have almost a 100 people registered, which is more than we expected.
- After we had launched our call for Talks, the first of you – one by one – came up with tentative contributions, and when we had reached a critical mass, you organised your **topics** and the **formats of your sessions** together with us. And this worked well.

We have 3 days with 3 themes building on one another – the social, the eco-social and the techno-eco-social –, and every **morning session** we will start with presentations of some basic concepts and a little time for q&a, and in every **last session** of a day we will give room to a general discussion. This discussion will be facilitated by a rather short introduction and is open to wrap up insights of the day, including feedbacks to the morning session (and even the sessions on days before). And it is oriented towards future practices.

So, we **did not plan to prejudge any final declaration**, we wanted, and still want, to ensure a free exchange on an equal footing. However, this intention was not met with approval by the culture department of the city of Vienna to which we had applied for funding. Its advisory board taught us that we would need a stricter organisation and should not allow an open-ended outcome in order to meet the scientific standard.

- Because further attempts to obtain funding failed too, we had to ask for help and we were able to get an **overwhelming response by our invited speakers**. A great number of them could afford to forego reimbursement of their travel and/or accommodation costs in whole or in part. Thank you, we are **deeply indebted** to you!

- Moreover, we **need to thank our donors in particular**. Without their funding, the event would have been unthinkable: So, we are grateful to our biggest donor, the **University of Hamburg**, as well as to the **Mandelbaum Verlag**, and to the **Vienna Convention Bureau** for their provisional funding commitment (that has yet to be materialised if and when our event will have fulfilled the criteria).

- And, last not least, we are thankful to the **Althangrund für Alle** for the special arrangement of providing the facilities, technical staff and food, here.

Now, allow me, to say a few words about our **motivation** to hold these Talks and about the **basic idea** underlying the Talks. GSIS, The Institute for a Global Sustainable Information Society is a newcomer among the independent research institutions in Austria, and our USP is to network researchers with **different backgrounds** in a **transdisciplinary manner**. They come from **whatever part of the world** and are working to find **solutions to problems that shape the so-called “Anthropocene”**. Hence our name – we are trying to visioneer a world society where digitisation promotes wisdom to keep anthropogenic hazards below the threshold of our own destruction.

The **impetus** for our Talks was given by the **current escalation of the many crises** around the world. Several crises are **close to passing a tipping point** beyond which the crisis would worsen. Not only would they **be directly or indirectly detrimental to the well-being of humans** but, eventually, also **pose an immediate threat to the survival of humanity** – that's why we need to be concerned.

For some time now, scientists and activists as well as politicians and journalists have been thinking of the ways out of the crises as **transformations**. In particular, they have become accustomed to speak about the so-called **social-ecological** transformation. Transformation is, of course, a way to overcome a crisis. But there is a **deeper meaning** to it. There is a **bigger picture** that can be revealed.

In fact, those **existential threats** are not new. They emerged already in the last century. They have just been **intensifying**.

They can be found in the 3 fields we want to talk about:

- (1) the social field,
- (2) the ecological field and
- (3) the technological field, according respectively
  - (1) to the social relations **among the members** of society,
  - (2) to the social relations of society **with nature** and
  - (3) to the social relations by which society produces and uses **technology**.

And in each field, the social relations typify a certain **logic of development**.

In short, the point is, as long as the development logics **did not harm**

- (1) **social progress or**
- (2) **natural productivity or**
- (3) **technological ingenuity,**

the logics were compatible with **social evolution**, that is, the evolution of human social systems.

But when social evolution reached the **planetary level**, when **external effects of social systems began to affect other societies**, and when the **means of actions** began to concern peoples **beyond the borders of their own societies**, the old logics turned out to be **incompatible** with the new conditions. They grew counterproductive. What is at stake is the **fate of the whole humanity**.

This situation is the **root cause** of the existential threats. And since these threats all depend on social relations, they follow similar patterns. And so, it is no surprise that the existential threats have been **intermingling** from the beginning. French philosopher and sociologist Edgar Morin called the result a **poly-crisis** – a complex of intricately interwoven different crises having the same origin.

The transformations to be done must therefore be **ways out of the poly-crisis**. They must be carefully co-ordinated with one another and form **one great transformation** that is based upon a **common strategy**. And this common strategy needs to point to a **common goal** – namely, to the **enablement of a continuation of social evolution on earth** that provides a **good society** worldwide, harbouring social relations that allow a **good life for any member** of humanity. This goal is a **utopia** – a **real**, that is, a realistic, a reasonable and – in the sense of German philosopher Ernst Bloch – a **concrete utopia**, and it is that because it is within reach by carrying out the **great transformation**. The task of the great transformation is the replacement of the **outdated development logics**. Thus, the real and concrete utopia includes at least 3 utopias, each of which represents a new logic of development, and the great transformation includes at least 3 corresponding transformations.

Altogether, utopias, developmental logics, and transformations form **3 musts**, as the titles of the entry sessions of each day insinuate:

- (1) the utopia of a **global culture uniting humanity through diversity**; such a culture can be implemented by the transformation of the culture towards a so-called **“convivial” organisation of sociality**, which observes justice and peace;
- (2) the utopia of a **sustainable planet**; such a planet can be achieved by a transformation that **relativises** anthropocentric approaches so much that the **relationship** between social and natural systems is allowed to do justice to their respective peculiarities – this is understood by a so-called **“anthroporelational” turn towards naturality**, which is inspired by convivial sociality; and
- (3) the utopia of **appropriate tools for an informed world civilisation**; such tools can be obtained through the transformation of technologies into a so-called **“meaningful” technological infrastructure** by subjecting them to the values and requirements of anthroporelational naturality and convivial sociality – meaningfulness is a property of an infrastructure if it affords being used for tackling existential threats, and the more it is designed for that, the more can it afford that.

The poly-crisis places *homo sapiens* for the first time in the state of a **community of destiny**. As far as the poly-crisis is **self-made**, it is possible to try to undo it if it is not too late.

From a **complex systems view**, the failure of a successful implementation of the necessary transformation would lead to **devolution** of humanity – that is, barbarism, collapse or extinction. But, serendipitously, the bifurcation point at which humanity has arrived in the Anthropocene opens up a variety of trajectories (pathways). Besides further disintegration, there is also **integration** of today’s differentiated, interdependent social systems possible. Such an integration would offer a **leap to a higher level of social systems evolution**. The necessary step to be done is the self-organisation of the interdependent systems into a so-called **“metasystem”**. A “metasystem” is a new system on a higher level that comprises the old systems on the lower level as its **elements**. As always with systems evolution in general, this happens for the sake of an **increase in synergy** which is due to new co-operation rules. And these co-operation rules are set up by the elements themselves.

The great transformation we should be talking about is basically such a **transformation into a metasystem**. Its purpose is to reach global **governance**. However, the metasystem humanity is needing is not a global state, is not a global government, but a meta-level framework for all social systems in a subsidiary manner, and it is built, and to be maintained, by actors from below.

Since vested interests are still stalling the transformation of world society into a place that is compatible with containing human-made risks, times of turmoil may be imminent.

This is the main idea which I would like to ask you to take into account during our Talks.

Thank you for your attention!