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Wiener's paradox – we can dissolve it together

Abstract

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In 1948 Norbert Wiener proposed that we should learn to update our societal communication and control by studying communication and control in nature and technology, and in that way (as we might say this today) become able to govern the Anthropocene. What resulted was a paradox. As Wiener himself pointed out in the last chapter of *Cybernetics*, society lacks a kind of communication that would allow it to take advantage of published scientific insights – including Wiener's own! Consequences of Wiener's paradox also include how the systems movement has been unable to add vitally needed insight to society's collective awareness (that we must understand our problems in terms of systems); and that *whatever* we (as the systems community and as academia) might think up and publish in an article may have no significant impact in the non-academic world.

Fortunately, there is a way to break the spell of this paradox. The general direction was described by Vannevar Bush in 1945, quoted and echoed by Wiener in the last chapter of *Cybernetics*, and developed technically by Doug Engelbart, early computer and Internet pioneer. The idea is to use knowledge media technology, in the form of information and communication technology (ICT), in order to re-create the communication and collaboration systems we want to see in the world – by *being* those systems. Applied to our situation at hand (to paraphrase Erich Jantsch), the ISSS “should make structural changes within itself toward a new purpose of enhancing society's capability for continuous self-renewal”.

By submitting this lecture and article we are reaching out to the systems community on behalf of Knowledge Federation community. We are a transdisciplinary community of knowledge media researchers and developers, collective capabilities professionals and enthusiasts, communication designers and other experts and stakeholders, who have self-organized to spearhead this way of working. There are several reasons why we are especially enthusiastic to collaborate with the ISSS community:

- the ISSS is in possession of insights that are needed to motivate massive adoption of the way of working we want to help foster – but they must become widely known,
- the ISSS is in possession of a body of knowledge that is necessary to develop our praxis,

- of all the established academic communities, the ISSS is the one that is most aware of the need for systemic self-organization and hence most likely to engage in it – as indeed this self-organization has already begun, at ISSS 57 Haiphong.

We propose that ISSS 59 Berlin will serve as platform to launch collaboration between makers and thinkers, and we invite you to co-create with us. The system designs we want to co-create with you are open - they can easily be modified, to reflect the state of the art in systems research and of knowledge media technology. They will enable you to render insights, not only in print, but also in real-world systems and in a way that circumvents the paradox. We invite you to explore with us relevant tools, methods, practices and projects that have been or are being developed in our participating communities. Through synergy, we may have the impact that is needed to dissolve the paradox. Let us have a conversation together in which we shall consider how to proceed.