

## Chapter 5 The Transition to a Biosensitive Society Commentary

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**Human Ecology Forum, Forum Theme:** Transforming Culture

This talk was based on Chapter 7 of the book, *Understanding Human Ecology*, by Rob Dyball and Barry Newell (nearly in press).

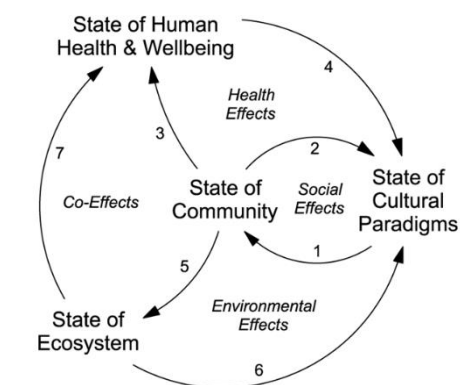
### Commentary

Taking Stephen Boyden's vision of a biosensitive society as the starting point, and Stephen's now 28 year old call for a theoretical framework and a methodology for human ecology to assist understanding of and improve communication about this field, Barry described briefly a system dynamics approach that has the potential to support the process of transitioning from a business-as-usual society to a biosensitive society. The overall description of the conceptual modelling approach and systems thinking is outlined in the associated articles on the Human Ecology Forum website (Newell 2012 GEC.pdf and Newell and Proust 2012 CCM Intro.pdf).

In brief, understanding the operation of reinforcing and balancing feedbacks in systems terms is core to planning change in any system. The response of a system to management interventions depends on the feedback interactions between the parts of that system. But any attempt to take account of all of the interactions soon runs into overwhelming complexity. Newell and Proust (2012: 13) have devised an approach to this problem that they call 'feedback-guided analysis' (or holistic reduction). The methodology enables the macro level system interrelationships and feedbacks to be maintained at more detailed levels of analysis. The method also provides a shared visual language to assist communication of these complex ideas. These are summarised in the actual presentation, found in Transition.pdf.

The discussion following the presentation focused on understanding the system modelling better and did not progress to looking into how using this approach might help with the process of designing a social change.

Building on the ideas presented, however, and looking at the variable State of Cultural Paradigms (see Figure 7.5), one can begin to consider how to approach a change process. For change to occur it is necessary for the society to learn (learning processes are represented by arrows labelled 2, 4 and 6 in Figure 7.5) as they perceive the impact of their actions on the state of their environment and on human health and wellbeing. The process is not straightforward, of course, because there are additional influence links (not shown in Figure 7.5) whereby the dominant paradigms tend to protect themselves by inhibiting the learning processes.



Dyball & Newell 2014 UHE Figure 7.5

Not attempted at this seminar was an exercise in scaling into more details to help develop deeper dialogue about the dynamics of societal change and how to bring influence to bear to change basic assumptions—and so change society. Perhaps later in the year.

Peter Tait