Faculty of Design

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Leveraging Tensions in Systemic Design

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RSD 9 workshop proposal

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https://systemic-design.net/rsd9call-for-workshops

TITLE: LEVERAGING TENSIONS IN SYSTEMIC DESIGN

The fate of all complex adapting systems in the biosphere - from single cells to economies - is to evolve to a natural state between order and chaos, a grand compromise between structure and surprise.

Stuart Kauffman*,* At Home in the Universe

Complex systems do not lend themselves to much simplification. Systemic designers have no choice but to embrace complexity, and in doing so, embrace opposing concepts and the resulting paradoxes. It is at the interplay of these ideas that they find the most fruitful regions of exploration.

Within the field of systemic design, we find tensions between the positions that different practitioners and scholars take and the methods, practices and ideas they promote. Rather than viewing these differences as problems that need resolving, we see those tensions and differences in perspectives and ideas as opportunities to develop the field.

Examples of tensions are:

- Humanizing systems versus technical systems solutions
- The do-ers/ entrepreneurs versus the thinkers/ philosophers in systemic design
- Bottom-up system innovation versus top down system innovation
- The need for predictability and structure versus the need for surprise and emergence
- Western ways of systems thinking versus indigenous, Eastern and other ways of systems thinking
- ….

The goal of this workshop is to explore the tensions that exist in the field of systemic design and the ways they can be leveraged to develop the field.

Key take-aways for participants will be to develop an overview of the broad landscape of systemic design positions and practices, reflect on their personal position within this field and their relation to other practitioners and scholars, and reflect on the opportunities to leverage tensions to develop new knowledge and ideas. In addition, as organisers of RSD10, we would like to use the workshop to co-create the theme for the 2021 edition of the RSD conference series and explore where we might find interesting areas for discussion and dialogue.

Plan

00:00-00:05	Welcome
00:05-00:15	Check in in break out rooms with systemic ice breaker
00:15-00:30	Plenary introduction to the topic and the importance of tensions in complexity and in the development of a scientific field.
00:30-01:20	In break out groups (maximum 5) explore tensions and visualise on a virtual whiteboard e.g. Miro

- Get people to individually reflect on tensions they are experiencing within the field of systemic design, for example, in conversations at RSD, papers written about systemic design, or discussion in related fields such as transition design (10mins)
- Share these experiences in break out room and visualise each on the whiteboard (20 mins)
- Explore each tension more deeply within the groups through prompting questions such as: what are extremes and who are related to these extremes? What and who are bridges? What does the tension produce? What are practical examples/ cases of where these tensions play out? What are important questions in relation to the tension that we'd like to explore further? How might we leverage those tensions? (20 mins)

01:20-01:35   Break

01:35-02:05   Bring the tension areas back to the main room and discuss the results of each group (6 x 5mins)

02:05-02:30   Plenary discussion about tension areas that participants would like to get more deeply into in the next conference & wrap up

Number of participants: maximum 30 over 6 break out rooms

Technical support: online meeting system with virtual break out rooms, virtual whiteboard.

Expected outcomes: after the workshop we would like to use the discussed tension areas for the development of the theme for RSD10. We could potentially present this back to the RSD9 audience at the conference wrap up, and run a quick online poll amongst all conference attendees to vote for the most interesting tension areas.