

eop – a transdisciplinary network for building horizontal structures
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Introduction:

Institutions are disintegrate, hierarchies become obsolete. Communication between decision-makers and those who pool information, innovation and action no longer works. Wrong decisions are made. Valuable know-how is squandered. In a highly complex world it is horizontal structures which are now required for providing sustainable management of society's needs.

„Emergence of Projects (eop)“ is a transdisciplinary network of artists and scientists developed by Helga Köcher through her systematic study and analysis of economics, cultural studies, arts and civil society. It designed to test the transformation form hierarchical structures to those based on the principle of partnership and to learn as well from this process. The model is based on the assumption, that creative individuals are more able to participate in such an experiment, because they less of a need to be led.

eop is located at the intersection of three dimensions

→ in terms of art, eop is a „social sculpture“- as defined by Joseph Beuys, -

→ in terms of social science, it is a lab for studying how horizontal structures are built up or rather build themselves.

→ Socio-politically, it is an emancipative and cooperative process conditioned by the withdrawal of state institutions as well as reduced public funding. Creative individuals organize under their own auspices and work on their themes in a sustainable way. Sustainable means here an accountable and economic handling of resources and self potential, but also a continuous intercommunication and exchange with the public.

Method:

eop basically differs from similar groups by its character as an open network and its bottom-up-dynamics. „Open“ because in principle anyone active in intellectual or artistic work is able to join. New members continuously join the network. „Bottom up“ means that eop has no fixed aim which should be implemented „top down“. Overall it concerns the realization of interdisciplinary projects and horizontal structures. But which projects in detail are shaped, which path are followed, which key aspects of activity are formulated, all this emerges within the network itself. All participants can decide to which extent they want to participate in and influence these processes.

eop sees itself as a work in progress. Its goal is to establish a self-perpetuating model which puts in place impulses for sustainable social development.

eop is a constructivist model: On the level of first order it is a creative brain trust of high diversity: it includes specialists from all art domains who work with exponents of sociology, organizational development, psychology, communication science, information technology, philosophy, educational science, journalism, linguistics, medicine, physics and molecular biology. They present their concepts to each other and receive feedback, support, suggestions and cooperation. According to the findings of Homan's Law, eop's heterogeneity prevents group identities and demonizing images arising. eop is also linked with NGO-platforms.

eop moves in real spaces, it reutilizes them innovatively and connects them. Professionally moderated meetings, which last four 4 hours, take place regularly in the lounge of a large private museum. A moderated e-mail-list supports the exchange

process. On the eop homepage www.eop.at participants can present themselves, results of Open Space-events can be followed and interested persons can contact eop.

On the level of second order eop is an open process, in which the participants act as observers and reflect the development and structuring of the network. They continuously analyze the conditions under which self-responsible horizontal communication and interaction structures can replace the mechanisms of hierarchic thinking and acting. The function and dysfunction of interventions are discussed as well as the transformation processes which are provoked by them.

Results and discussion:

Space of dialogue vs. space of action:

At the end of the third year of this experiment, the following observations can be made: There is a significant difference between the space of dialogue and the space of action: eop's space of dialogue is extraordinary harmonic and productive. The ambiance of the moderated meetings is highly agreeable and inspiring. Striking is the strong integrational force of this setting: newcomers become as involved as the founding members. Numerous spin-off-projects arise out of the diversity of this network– this means projects of two or three participants, who became acquainted at eop.

As the building of group identity grows, so too does the need for projects which involve a significant portion of the network and which presents the network to the public. The focus of this need is on topics relating to social structures - e.g. the public space, the economization of art and science, the communication between different spheres. It turns out, that the readiness for transdisciplinary discourse correlates with the interest in sustainable work.

When, out of the discussion of these topics, ideas for concrete projects arise, cross-functional project group is necessary which has the ability of conceptualization, leadership, implementation and or guiding the process. At this point difficulties often arise, because the participants tend to follow their usual solitary patterns of action, as they switch from the space of dialogue to the space of action. They still have to learn to proceed in a structured way and accustom themselves to reliable communication structures.

Involving the stake holders

eop has developed a unique type of Open Space by combining traditional exhibitions with participatory Open Space meetings as sustainable dialogue with the public. Thus independent of the particular topic, all stakeholders are invited to these meetings. This model was successfully proved in various pilot projects. eop as well runs practical projects with students of life science, which result in a transdisciplinary discourse with public involvement.

Analyses and documentation of such projects supplies material for yet further questions: The centre of interest at the moment for instance is the problem of communication in heterogeneous fields, the preferred media and the question, how an adequate flow of communication between participants with different practice of communication could be coordinated. This has led to follow-up projects. The results are sustainable development and work which is durable and efficient.

The collective projects of eop are characterized by a good balance of quality and emotion. The work in eop inspires working with related and distant disciplines and, to working on

socially relevant questions instead of centrally dictated specialist themes. Artworks are created which are more meaningful than commissioned or tendered ones; lively discussions are provoked. The need for profound involvement with topics and broader coverage of the discursive field is growing.

Socio-scientific lab

Within the current cycles of action research - analyses, discussion, planning of action and realization of projects – behavioral patterns which are typical for creative persons nowadays can be observed. They differ in part from well-established presumptions. Personal communication for instance is very desirable. Virtual communication becomes relevant only after trust has been established.

The socio-scientific lab aspect of eop is quite fruitful. Interesting data is continuously accumulated, the abundance of which the participants have yet to make full use. eop currently is searching for a partner for a future network research project.

Network communicator – defining a new profession concept

For a model such as eop a professional facilitator of the process is essential, but likewise the role of a network communicator. This could be a new satisfying occupation which at the same time would have valuable advisory function for respective institutions and research institutes. Important for the long-term engagement of the participants is the possibility of cooperating with institutions on equal terms, and not limited to financial parity. After all, there is currently no media attention to bottom-up structures.

Conclusion:

The exchange of knowledge and know-how and the mutual support provided in this creative pool, characterized by its great diversity, lead to a gain of synergy. Resources can be used much more efficiently by transdisciplinary approaches and its application to the process of organizational development. Communication between the creative and innovative minds of the various disciplines and the public is fostered. This leads to increased transparency of the artistic and scientific processes. Furthermore eop has proven to be an excellent model for observing the bridge between institutions, cultural- and scientific policy and the public and for providing cost-saving exemplary evaluation of transdisciplinary projects.