

“Machen ist wie Wollen – nur besser! From Knowledge to Action – ESD versus Climate Change”, November 14th 2017, Bonn, Germany

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The term ‘global citizenship’ has many interpretations. The approach to global citizenship I justify as essential for climate change conversations today is different from traditional conceptualizations that tend to focus on prescribed values and competencies that extend the concerns and good will of national citizens outwards.

I argue that the global citizenship that could make a difference for the unprecedented challenges facing the planet and humanity today needs to propel human existence beyond a single story of progress, development and human evolution: beyond exchange value and consumerism, identities and belonging defined by territorial borders, the separation of humans from nature and the totalizing rationality of individualism.

However, there are many reasons why I **do not** propose this global citizenship ‘otherwise’ as a normative ideal. I put it on the table as an invitation to our collective imagination that can potentially remind us that it is possible to think about co-existence in very different ways than we are used to.

Another reason for not offering this as a normative ideal is timing. In Brazil we have a proverb that says that, in a flood situation, it is only when the water reaches your hip that it is possible for us to start to swim. Until then, we can only walk, as we always did. The waters are rising, but they have not reached the hip yet for many in this part of the world.

Global citizenship ‘otherwise’ emphasizes the need for a fundamental existential shift in our relationship with knowledge, being and reality. Its pedagogical orientation prioritizes “sitting with” the discomfort of facing the paradoxes, complexities, uncertainties, inequalities of globalization as well as our complicities in harm. It aims to have us prepared to face the difficulties and joys of “walking through” global change together and for this to happen, it supports us to expand our sensibilities and constellations of knowledge and affect in order to expand possibilities for co-existence in a fragile planet.

This approach comes as response to the failures of education defined within a modern context of knowledge production, where we tend to believe that more data/knowledge will change our convictions and the right convictions will change our behaviour. This unexamined assumption is driven by our modern desires for certainty, coherence, consensus and control. We seem to want the same engineering principles used for building airplanes to apply to people and societies. In this context, our ‘hope’ is directed towards the continuity of the present and the

extension of our values to the entirety of the globe. Our imagination gets trapped in a loop and fails to engage with possibilities that lie outside our narrow frames of intelligibility. In this context, GCE is reduced to the transmission of “values” and the development of “competencies” to put these values in practice in producing more of the same understandings and same solutions. Without a more sophisticated engagement with the challenges of intervening in complex and dynamic systems, this kind of global citizenship will continue to reproduce unequal relationships between dominant and marginalized populations, simplistic explanations of inequality, and ethnocentric and paternalistic ideals of justice, responsibility, and change.

Twenty years ago, it would have been impossible to challenge this pattern of thinking, but today things are different. Technology has already shifted the ways we know and relate and we are just starting to understand how: political polarization, boredom, indifference, loneliness and cyber-bullying may be just the tip of a huge iceberg. Mass migration is altering the ways we feel about community. Automation and financialization have also changed the context of employment relations and labour security and availability. The facts of a surplus labour force and job precarity also change the way young people relate to their worklife and their future. On top of it, add increasing violences, wealth disparity and environmental disasters. When this results in rising anxiety, depression and self-harm in high schools and universities (and the rest of society) particularly in high income countries, it is surprising that we are surprised. The promises of happiness achieved through metropolitan individual consumerism are being put to the test and, as these promises appear increasingly out of reach, the disenchantment and disillusionment that this provokes is creating a context of mass existential crisis.

Educationally, this can be a generative opportunity. If addressed properly, this is precisely what might propel us towards alternatives that are viable, but appear impossible within our current paradigms – what I call the “adjacent possible”: a different kind of existence. As long as unending growth and consumption are the only intelligible horizons of progress and hope, we are stuck in a place where the solutions of the past no longer fit our present challenges, but we are unable to imagine otherwise. And yet, we also know this is unsustainable. We cannot ignore that, whether it is happening quickly or slowly, “the waters are rising”. We need to prepare for when it will be possible to swim. We need to learn from other swimmers. We need to learn to assist with the inevitable death of a system that has given us many gifts, but also caused incredible harm. We also need to learn to assist with the birth of something new, undefined, potentially (but not necessarily) wiser, without suffocating the baby in the process. We need to face up to the reality of the same mistakes we have been repeatedly making in order to only make new and different mistakes in the future. We need to learn we are part of one large metabolism, that we are connected and inter-dependent in our vulnerabilities, and that turning our back to each other is like severing our own limbs.

In practical terms, what do we do? My pedagogical response is “deep-end” learning. We face our fears and the ugly realities we have had to deny in order to remain comfortable, we bust our illusions, we get uncomfortable, we get real. We expand notions of existence, belonging, self-worth and fulfilment beyond markets, states, cities, techno-dreams, and narcissistic individualism. We learn to trust and to walk differently with one another in a long and foggy road. Like Bauman explains with reference to Goethe, we realize that happiness “is not a row of uninterrupted better and better pleasures”, but is found in the overcoming of challenges, in the struggle for survival, for well being.

With my research team and a collective of eco-social innovation initiatives around the world, our educational starting point has been the expansion of notions of justice. We have developed a framework that we call Earth CARE justice, which guides us to sit at the edge of what is knowable and possible in education today while seeking the (yet) “impossible”.

This framework is meant to start conversations about adjacent possible futures, rather than serve as a prescriptive model of global citizenship. To work with and through impossibilities will require that we face the world in its full complexity and uncertainty, learn from old mistakes and make new ones, and mourn the loss of the old investments and illusions that led us to this point. I leave you with the synthesis of this framework and, for those who are ready to swim, an invitation to jump into the deep end.