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Introduction to the special issue dedicated to
Evolutionary Development.

Evolutionary Development: Sustainability ... and Beyond!

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Guest Editors

Introduction

This special issue of *World Futures* is dedicated to the theme of Evolutionary Development. It follows up on and complements the ground-breaking work presented in the April–June 2003 special issue of *World Futures* guest edited by Peter Seidel on Survival Research (Vol. 59, Nos. 3-4). The present collection of articles by scholars and practitioners in the emerging field of Evolutionary Development covers the thinking and action of some of the world's most visionary scholars of general evolution as it applies to issues of collective learning, self-directed community development, business transformation, and technological innovation. It is our hope that this special edition will move the discourse on general evolution in directions that include and transcend survival concerns, inspiring life-affirming initiatives that are in dynamic harmony — in syntony — with the creative patterns of constructive evolutionary change. Each article represents a guide to evolutionary paths in one or another of these directions, and each suggests future-creating dynamics for those interested in, and willing to search for and help create, a path with heart.

Most of the well intentioned development efforts that account for much of the “progress” achieved in the past, in both more developed and less developing countries, are responsible for major environmental damage and the widening of the gap between rich and poor on a global scale. To look at development from a systemic and evolutionary perspective involves making

explicit, and embracing, the values, perspectives, assumptions, and knowledge required to move human societal systems to an ethical social-innovation phase. How can we foster dynamics that make development locally relevant and globally attuned? How can development promote higher quality of life? How can our species learn to live simply and meaningfully yet both productively and in dynamic harmony with life and the life support systems of planet earth? By and large, these are as yet unaddressed challenges of development, and they are the ones to which inquiry on Evolutionary Development is dedicated.

Evolutionary Development points in the direction of sustainability, but its ideals go far beyond. It fosters communities that strive toward sustainable pathways for self-directed development in synergetic interaction with their milieu through individual and collective processes of evolutionary learning. On small scale, this translates into what are called “evolutionary learning communities” (ELCs) (K.C. Laszlo, 2001; Laszlo & Laszlo, 2000). On large scale, through technologies of human interaction such as Evolutionary Systems Design (ESD), communities of diverse ELCs can consciously catalyze conditions through which an evolutionary learning society could emerge (Laszlo, 2003a, 2003b).

The notion of *syntony* is central to Evolutionary Development. We first encountered the concept of syntony in the work of Eric Jantsch. He writes of syntony as “inquiry at the evolutionary level par excellence” (1975, p. 103). As we have come to understand it, syntony is a creative aligning and tuning with the evolutionary processes of which we are a part. It involves finding and creating meaning and evolutionary opportunity, both individually and collectively (Laszlo, 2003b). Once learned and mastered, syntony can serve as a powerful organizing force in societal evolution. Learning to engage in intentional change processes with an understanding of syntony requires appreciation and cultivation of diachronic harmony and evolutionary consonance at various levels of change in interconnected complex dynamic systems. In short, it requires pattern recognition and attunement in change processes. The beauty of accepting the challenge of creating of systems of syntony is that it provides coherence and consistency to Evolutionary Development initiatives. Not only is this a useful change management competency, it addresses the urgent need, as Jantsch put it, “to learn now to design systems of syntony” (Jantsch, 1975, p. 270). To this end, Evolutionary Development efforts promote intrapersonal syntony (physical, psychological, and spiritual meta-stability and balance), interpersonal syntony (community and societal peace and dynamic harmony), environmental

syntony (ecosystemic consonance and sustainability) and future-oriented syntony (consistency and coherence in past, present, and future actions and mindfulness for future generations).

Inquiry into Evolutionary Learning Community and Evolutionary Development departs from well established foundations of evolutionary understanding based in the sciences of complexity, from emancipatory and participatory traditions of systems science, from human science, and from the expanding evidence that points to the interrelated set of global problems that threaten the shared future of humanity and many other species. Evolutionary Development is the bigger picture that includes, but is not limited to, action-research on ELC through ESD. It creates a design space for the conscious, purposeful, and intentional alignment of human initiative with evolutionary purpose. As such, Evolutionary Development is an approach for policy formulation and citizen empowerment; for global thinking, local action, and moral behavior; for top-down decision taking and bottom-up initiatives. However, the unfolding of such a process is of necessity emergent and self-organizing — faithfully replicating the strategy of natural evolutionary development in the chemical, physical, biological, social and possibly even transpersonal realms (Laszlo, 2003b). The articles in this special addition explore the various ways in which Evolutionary Development involves an intertwined dynamic that exists among various types of development – human, social, economic, sustainable. In essence, Evolutionary Development is a call for integration, for applying what we already know, for innovating with the future of the planet in mind, and ultimately, for reinventing what it means to be human.

As an initial answer to this call, we have assembled a fine collection of articles from authors representing development concerns from North and South. This special issue has been organized as follows:

Part 1. Knowledge and learning. This grouping of articles explores the expansion of the boundaries of what traditionally has been considered as education in order to integrate learning and knowledge creation processes into all sectors of society. Agustín Buendía and Carolina Morales connect their vision of a lifelong educational paradigm, grounded in systemic and humanistic traditions, to the imperative of Evolutionary Development. Rodolfo Loyola presents a compelling case for the use of his Conversational Structure Model into mainstream educational settings. Gregorio Rivera shifts the discourse to a consideration of the ways in which the arts and sciences merge in the application of Evolutionary Systems Design to the formation of a

virtual Evolutionary Learning Community dedicated to exploring guiding images of sustainable futures.

Part 2. Societal Transformation and Self-directed Sustainable Development. This collection of articles present guidelines and heuristics for organizations and communities to self-organize for the improvement of their quality of life in a framework of dynamic sustainability. Matthew Shapiro opens this section by bringing to this inquiry on Evolutionary Development the cutting edge ideas on democracy and conscious evolution first developed a century ago by Mary Parker Follett. Marcia Campos presents the experience of a strategic planning process that incorporates Evolutionary Development perspectives for the creation of human, social, and ecosystemic capital in one of the regions in the south of Mexico with greatest need for effective and creative development solutions. Honorato Teissier reports on another Evolutionary Development intervention in northern Mexico where he uses the model of the Regional Development Observatory to involve stakeholders in the self-design of their community's future.

Part 3. Evolution of Business. These articles contribute to the evolution of a business culture that embraces financial, social, and environmental sustainability as equally important, and ultimately inseparable, objectives. Kathia Castro Laszlo makes a case for evolutionary corporations to go beyond the single bottom line and become agents of socio-cultural evolution and planetary well-being. Frank Poletti and Jay Ogilvy report on a conference at Esalen Institute where a group of leaders in the sustainability movement explore the future of globalization and the evolutionary paths of "attunement" (similar those of syntony) for corporations, non-profit organizations, and civil society. Sherryl Stalinski explores the boundaries of the role of organizational professionals in creating meaningful paths for corporations and corporate leaders to create wealth along both human and planetary dimensions.

Part 4. Technology Policy and Innovation. This final set of articles investigate the development of soft technologies (technologies of human interaction), sustainable technologies (green or ecological technologies), and information and communication technologies applied to evolutionary development. John Broadbent presents a cogent argument for the alignment of the evolutionary process at biological, cognitive, and sociocultural levels, suggesting that while the timeframes for manifest change at each level may decrease exponentially, the underlying patterns and dynamics point to a common over-arching process which could significantly enrich our understanding of design in service of Evolutionary Development. Alexander Laszlo

concludes this special issue with a piece that is both descriptive and prospective, exploring the evolution of technology and the role of technologies of human interaction in the creation of the conditions that consciously favor life-affirming futures.

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