

The path of humanity

societal innovation for the world of tomorrow

Henk Diepenmaat (2018)

Today's societies are at a breaking point, characterized by problems like the 'plastic soup', climate change, inadequate health care, and social isolation. It is a time of transition. Human nature, often rather self-absorbed, seems powerless to turn the tide.

Yet for hundreds of millennia our species has unconsciously been following an unseen path of improvement, with all its ups and downs, in our evolution from hunter-gatherers to agricultural societies, city-states, modern nation-states, and finally to the late-modern world of today.

By recognizing this 'path of humanity' and consciously following it, we can greatly improve and even accelerate societal development. Taking 'the path' offers humanity new opportunities for societal innovation, and makes acting together as Team World the obvious choice.

The author shows how 'recursive perspectivism' enables us to see the experiential space in which we as actors shape our societal lives. This far-reaching hypothesis reveals a discrete numeric landscape of perspectives that explains empirical pattern-distribution laws such as the laws of Zipf and Benford, and the Pareto principle. It gives a leading role to prime numbers.

The 'path of humanity' seems to be the most promising, and in the long term most likely, path of development through this landscape. Attractive and stable societies are generally located along this path. The experiential landscape has entropic, statistical, relativistic, and quantum-theoretical properties, all of which have implications for our journey. These properties and their consequences call for methods for innovation within societies that are adapted to the particular situation at hand, with colourful names like the 'penta helix', 'multi-actor process management', the 'societal innovation cube', and the 'backbone'.

The Path of Humanity provides fascinating insights for anyone wanting to understand and foster our shared journey to the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

‘This book by Henk Diepenmaat is a magnum opus – a rich, substantial, and engaging book in which he takes us on a journey down *the path of humanity*. Instead of taking the “issue of the day” view of societal practices, he outlines his vision of a clear and long-term path of progress that is the product of deep reflection about how societies develop. His ideas and arguments shed a remarkable light on the erratic course of human development, and they represent a highly optimistic route to our future. *The Path of Humanity* is inspirational food for thought about both the nature of societal development and what we as people are capable of together.’

Jacqueline Cramer, Professor of Sustainable Innovation, Utrecht University,
Former Netherlands Minister of Public Housing, Spatial Planning, and the
Environment

‘As a sustainability researcher, I’m profoundly impressed by this book. It highlights the question whether we can not only *do our things better* as a society, but also *do the better things*. The key lies in reinventing systems that are based on human values and our needs for individuality, connection, and accountability. This won’t happen overnight, but rather in steps that recursive perspectivism helps us to understand. One bizarre discovery is that there are patterns in the path of humanity with an important role for prime numbers.’

René Kemp, Professor of Innovation and Sustainable Development, ICIS,
Maastricht University
Professorial Fellow at United Nations University-MERIT

Henk Diepenmaat, PhD MSc MSc (b. 1962) has a consultancy practice in multi-actor process management and innovation: Actors Process Management BV. Improving societal practices is what inspires him most. With over thirty years’ experience in studying and designing custom approaches in complex playing fields, he advises and supports companies, governmental bodies, and other organizations with strategy, policy, programmes, multi-actor innovation, and sustainability. He also gives training courses in multi-actor process management and innovation, geared to the participants’ particular issues. Henk is a professorial fellow at ICIS, the sustainability institute of Maastricht University. He is married and has two young adult sons. He lives and works at the edge of the woods in the Dutch town of Zeist.