


Call to apply for participation in the
**Open Science Dialogue on “Seeds of the Good Anthropocene: A
Southern African Perspective”**

Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Studies (STIAS), Stellenbosch, South Africa
3-4 November 2014



Dear Colleague,

We are pleased to invite you to apply to participate in the first **Open Science Dialogue** on **“Seeds of the Good Anthropocene: A Southern African Perspective”** that will take place at the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Studies (STIAS), Stellenbosch, South Africa from 3–4 November 2014, organised by SAPECS (www.sapecs.org) and the Complexity Forum (<http://www.sun.ac.za/complexity>).

Background and Motivation

Humanity confronts a daunting challenge in the 21st century: to meet widely-held aspirations for equitable human development without undermining the capacity of ecosystems to support future human well-being¹. The past two centuries have seen dramatic gains in human well-being, largely achieved through conversion of land to agriculture and the appropriation of natural resources such as timber and fish². However, the extent and cumulative impact of human changes to ecosystems now substantially affect the functioning of the Earth system, such as the climate and biological evolution, and potentially threaten the planetary conditions required for flourishing human societies³. The scale of human changes to the Earth have come to rival the great forces of nature, and have inadvertently shepherded us into a new planetary era – the Anthropocene⁴.

There is a growing recognition that dramatic social and technological changes are required to achieve a “Good Anthropocene” – a future that meets the deeply intertwined development and environmental challenges society faces, in a world profoundly shaped by human actions. A substantial body of evidence suggests that the current trajectory of global development will likely fail to meet human development aspirations due to large-scale negative consequences of environmental change and degradation^{2,5}. A fundamentally different way of generating prosperity is required if we are to realize equitable human development for the large portion of the world’s people, including many yet unborn, who continue to live in poverty. Although discussed in some quarters, returning to pre-industrial era human populations and lifestyles is not a viable option for addressing this challenge. Instead, we need to find a different way of living in the Anthropocene.

Achieving a “Good Anthropocene” may potentially require a transformation as radical as the shift from the Medieval to Industrial era in Europe – i.e., a fundamental shift in underlying values, assumptions, cultures and worldviews that govern the institutions and behaviour of modern society. However, imagining how such dramatic changes might take hold in our current world, and the kinds of worlds it

could lead to, is extremely challenging. Human imagination and scientific tools tend to be confined to the conditions of the present. Consequently, many discussions about the Earth and human society's future are characterized by negativity, or romantic notions of pre-industrial societies. Where sustainable futures are considered and discussed, they tend to entail "major tweaks" to the current underlying values, rationale and institutions on which modern society is based, rather than radically alternative futures.

During the "Seeds of the Good Anthropocene Open Science Dialogue" that will be held in Stellenbosch from 3–4 November 2014, participants are invited to join the global discussion in exploring how current thought trends can be challenged and to consider the potential for profoundly different positive futures for humanity and the environment compared to the current world in which we live. The Stellenbosch "Seeds of the Good Anthropocene Open Science Dialogue" forms part of a larger global initiative under the auspices of *Future Earth*^{*}, and aims to specifically consider and contribute a southern African perspective. Clearly, there are multiple and divergent perspectives as well as biophysical and social possibilities for what might constitute a "Good Anthropocene".

The goal of the meeting is not to identify or define a particular "Good Anthropocene", but rather to start scoping a range of possible "good" futures based on perspectives from a variety of regional actors, and to consider underlying similarities and differences between alternative conceptions of unconventional positive futures. At the same time we hope to foster a network of change agents in the region, by bringing together and connecting a diverse group of people with a particular interest in envisioning and shaping positive regional futures.

The Open Science Dialogue aims to scope these alternative futures primarily by collecting ideas and examples of innovations and experiments that exist in the region today in "seed" form, which different people believe could potentially be fostered and scaled up to contribute to a Good Anthropocene. Given the complex, emergent nature of the social-ecological systems that comprise regional and global society, it is unlikely that we can identify coherent, radically different alternative futures in their entirety. For instance, for someone living in medieval times, it is probably impossible to have imagined the Industrial world, or the world it has led to today. From a complex systems perspective, however, the "seeds" that eventually create radically different futures often exist in embryonic or small-scale form long in advance of large societal transformations. Rather than trying to map out alternative possible futures whole-sale, our aim is to identify innovative "seeds" of change that already exist today, and could potentially combine to create some radically different emergent future worlds.

One of the most important drivers of societal change towards sustainability will likely be the shocks, crises, and breakdowns that resulting from an increasingly unviable development trajectory. The stories we use to make sense of these crises will perhaps be the most important factor in determining how society responds, and whether such crises are used as opportunities for leveraging change. Alex Evans argues that one of the most dangerous stories is a tale of civilizational over-reach and collapse: "The great danger of the collapse story is that if enough people start to believe it, then it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Stories are powerful things, after all: they create our reality as much as they explain it. If the ones we reach for to comprehend what's going on, when everything seems to be coming apart at the seams, are ones that lead on themes of disaster, fragmentation, and breakdown, and that offer no hope of making it over the chasm to safety, then it becomes much more likely that

* <http://www.futureearth.info/>

we'll find ourselves confronting just such a scenario." If, on the other hand, we have stories, visions and signs, including weak signals – the so-called “pockets of the future in the present” – that are positive, inspiring and purposeful, they could have the power to drive a different, and much more hopeful, kind of transformation. Through this interactive scoping process we aim to start fostering a dialogue on positive regional and global futures.

Dialogue Format

The Open Science Dialogue aims to creatively scope alternative elements of a Good Anthropocene by identifying various weak signals or ‘pockets of the future’ in the present, as well as scoping the diversity of ideas and visions of aspects of the Good Anthropocene that do not yet exist. The dialogue will be professionally facilitated and centred around a variety of brainstorming/dialogue breakout groups. A combination of futures tools and techniques, design principles, and appreciative inquiry will be used to stimulate and creatively engage participants.

We hope to attract no more than 75 participants from a wide range of backgrounds and perspectives. Several prominent regional and international thinkers will provide thought-provoking perspectives to stimulate the breakout discussions. The dialogue will also feature an exhibition depicting a variety of ideas on the Good Anthropocene.

Application requirements

In order to apply for the Open Science Dialogue, applicants are required to submit a short paragraph or abstract of a potential “seed” of the Good Anthropocene” (see [application form](#) for more details). Applicants will be selected on the basis of the submitted abstract/paragraph. Successful participants will be pre-assigned to one of several groups clustered around (an estimated) seven themes emerging from the abstracts in order to kick-off generic dialogue at the workshop. Ensuing groups will be organised around discussion topics as per the programme below.

No application fee is charged for participating in the Dialogue, which includes lunches and a cocktail dinner on Monday 3 November. Applicants will however need to cover their own transport and accommodation costs.

Application Deadline

Please fill in the online [application form](#) by **30 September 2014**. Successful applicants will be informed by 6 October 2014.

If you have any problems accessing the form, please email Rika Preiser at rika@sun.ac.za

References

1. Griggs, D., Stafford-Smith, M., Gaffney, O., Rockstrom, J., Ohman, M. C., Shyamsundar, P., Steffen, W., Glaser, G., Kanie, N. & Noble, I. Policy: Sustainable development goals for people and planet. *Nature* 495, 305-307 (2013).
2. MA. *Ecosystems and human well-being: Synthesis* (Island Press, 2005).
3. Rockström, J., Steffen, W. L., Noone, K., Persson, Å., Chapin, F. S., Lambin, E. F., Lenton, T. M., Scheffer, M., Folke, C., Schellnhuber, H. J., Nykvist, B., de Wit, C. A., Hughes, T. P., van der Leeuw, Z., Rodhe, H., Sörlin, S., Snyder, P. K., Constanza, R., Svedin, U., Falkenmark, M., Karlberg, L., Correll, R. W., Fabry, V. J., Hansen, J., Walker, B. H., Liverman, D., Richardson, K., Crutzen, P. J. & Foley, J. A. A safe operating space for humanity. *Nature* 461, 472-475 (2009).
4. Steffen, W. L., Crutzen, P. J. & McNeill, J. R. The Anthropocene: Are humans now overwhelming the great forces of Nature? *Ambio* 36, 614-621 (2007).
5. IPCC. *Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability* (Cambridge University Press, 2014).

Call for artefacts

Open Science Dialogue on “Seeds of the Good Anthropocene: A Southern African Perspective Exhibit



As part of the Open Science Dialogue, we aim to curate a small, focused exhibit of artefacts (prototypes, reports or publications, notebooks, posters, diagrams or photographs) depicting Seeds Good Anthropocene. This exhibit can be used throughout the workshop as a site of dialogue and reflection, and to stimulate creative thinking about the Good Anthropocene. We are interested in submissions of original materials. The main audience for the exhibit is the approximately 75 people attending the Open Science Dialogue. We plan to use this exhibit throughout the forum as a site of dialogue and reflection in an integrated way in the programme. So submitting an artefact for us to consider implies that you are willing to attend and also engage in discussing your work it further at the workshop.

How to submit your work

Send an image and a half page description of your artefact to us by **30 September 2014**. This should cover when, where, how and why the artefact was created, by who, and how audiences/users usually engage with it. Tell us about its key features and why it will be interesting to the dialogue meeting. We also request any special instructions on handling the artefact, insurance, credits, printing or returning it including, if relevant, information about its size.

Given the constraints associated with our location and resources, we are able to work with the following kinds of artefact: prototypes, reports or publications, notebooks, posters, diagrams or photographs (physical objects up to 1m x 1m). Depending on what is submitted and selected, we will curate an exhibit that might include items on wall, tables, or displayed on screen.

Process

We will review submissions and select artefacts that we believe portray innovative visions that might depict “Seeds of the Good Anthropocene”. We will confirm in writing by 6 October 2014 if we are able to exhibit your artefact and then engage with you about practicalities. We will ask you to be responsible for transporting and exhibiting your artefact at STIAS.

Application Deadline

Please fill in the online [application form](#) by **30 September 2014**.

If you have any problems accessing the form, please email Rika Preiser at rika@sun.ac.za

Program

Open Science Dialogue on “Seeds of the Good Anthropocene: A Southern African Perspective



DAY 1: MONDAY 3 NOVEMBER		
09:30 – 10:00	Exhibit setup	Those with exhibits arrive early to set them up
10:00 – 10:30	Arrival coffee	Opportunity to network & browse exhibit
10:30 – 10:45	Welcome and brief intro: Oonsie Biggs	Brief background on the workshop, and what we mean by Good Anthropocene
10:45 – 11:15	Opening keynote: Carl Folke	20 min plus questions
11:15 – 11:30	Intro to Workshop process: Tanja Hichert	Explain objectives, process and programme. Highlight the importance of collaborative, iterative, futures-oriented and experimental approaches
11:30 – 12:30	Pre-assigned group discussions	People present each other’s abstracts, generate ideas around their theme and tour the exhibit (exhibitors to stand by their exhibit)
12:30 – 13:00	Plenary feedback	Rapid format: 3 minutes per group—abstract discussion & exhibit experience
13:00 – 14:00	LUNCH	
14:00 – 14:30	Food for thought: Iraj Abedian (TBC)	20 min plus questions
14:30 – 15:15	Same pre-assigned groups	‘Seeding’ the Good Anthropocene Discuss values, worldviews, assumptions and challenges underlying the different themes
15:15 – 15:45	Plenary feedback	Rapid format: 3 minutes per group - ‘Seeding’ the Good Anthropocene
15:45 – 16:15	TEA / COFFEE BREAK	
16:15 – 16:45	Food for thought: Deon Nel (TBC)	20 min plus questions
16:45 – 17:30	Ideas Market	Groups self-organise around good ideas encapsulated and ‘advertised’ on posters. Anything goes.
17:30	COCKTAIL DINNER AND DRINKS	

DAY 2: TUESDAY 4 NOVEMBER		
09:00 – 09:30	Food for thought: Bob Scholes	20 min plus questions
09:30 – 10:00	Food for thought: Jane Battersby- Lennard (TBC)	20 min plus questions
10:00 – 10:45	Plenary feedback	Rapid format: 3 minutes per group - 'Ideas Market', ideas wall and reflections of the previous day Identify and agree on (7 – 10) leading ideas
10:45 – 11:15	TEA / COFFEE BREAK	
11:15 – 11:45	Food for thought: Warren Nilsson	20 min plus questions
11:45 – 12:30	Breakout groups organised per idea (expect to be partly overlapping with previous day)	'Planting' the Good Anthropocene Expand on ideas (new ideas can be added), test for robustness (ask 'so what?'), implementation, impediments, fostering, scaling, steps towards, operationalization, etc.
12:30 – 13:00	Plenary feedback	Rapid format: 3 minutes per group - 'Planting' the Good Anthropocene
13:00 – 14:00	LUNCH	
14:00 – 14:45	Ideas Market	'Nurturing' the Good Anthropocene Groups self-organise around 'now what?' – What can I/we do going forward.
14:45 – 15:30	Plenary feedback	'Nurturing' the Good Anthropocene – 3 min per group
15:30 – 16:00	Closure & Way forward	Rika/Tanja/Oonsie
16:00 – 16:30	CLOSING TEA / COFFEE	