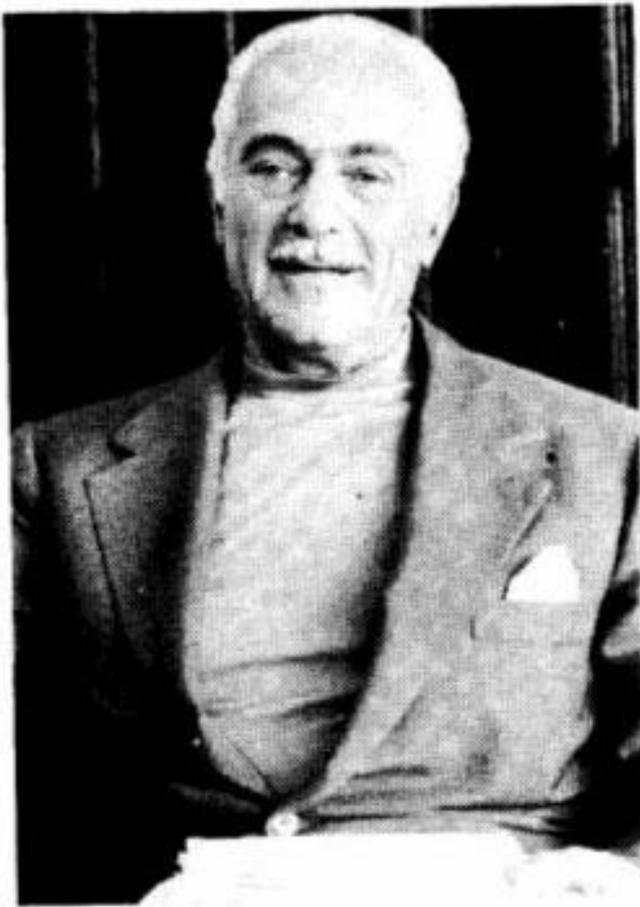


How to begin the next Renaissance - preliminary version

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Being a theoretical scientist by background, I tend to begin my articles with general motivating observations and definitions. This time I hold back and introduce *information design* (I attribute to this term a specific, *designed* meaning, see Karabeg, 2003) with an application which is currently under development. I call it 'Key Point Dialog'.

Motivation



Aurelio Peccei - his message did not reach us.

Three things must be said about Aurelio Peccei. The first is that he was a successful business leader. Peccei was one of the key people in Fiat, the president of Olivetti and of several international monetary operations. This suggests that he was a down-to-earth man with good grasp of reality. The second is that Peccei was, as a member of the Italian Resistance during the Second World War, imprisoned and tortured by Gestapo without revealing the names of his contacts. This shows that he was a man with uncommon courage and integrity. The third is that Peccei was the founder and the first

president of the Club of Rome. The Club numbered about one hundred chosen international experts in key areas, researching into the prospects for the humankind. This shows that Peccei's ideas about this subject were based on substantial evidence.

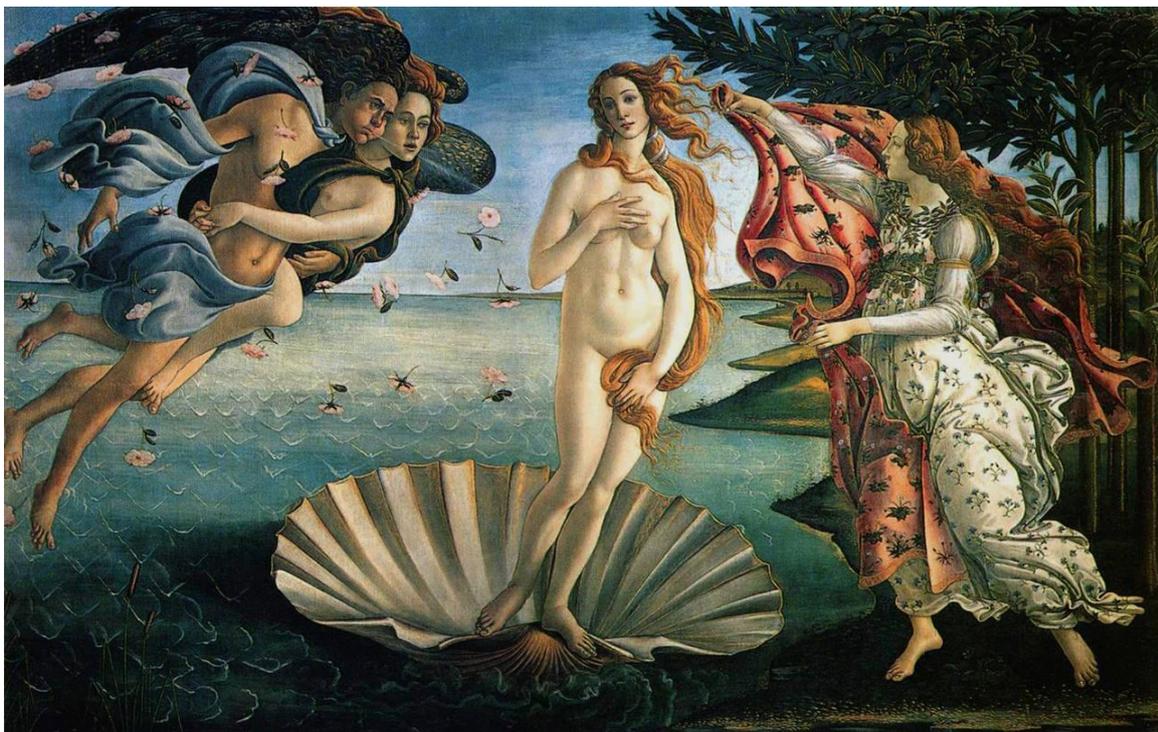
In 1981, based on a decade of Club's research, Peccei wrote: "The future will either be the inspired product of a great cultural revival, or there will be no future" (Peccei, 1981).

While the research that led to this conclusion was extensive, the conclusion itself is already accessible based on an intuitive argument: The development of technology in recent decades has been so rapid that our culture has fallen behind. Therefore we have not evolved enough culturally to be able to use our advanced technology meaningfully and safely. Peccei was so convinced that we are now the main limiting factor of progress that he called his autobiography "The Human Quality".

A quarter of a century later, the great cultural revival which Peccei deemed necessary is still out of sight.

"It is absolutely necessary to find a way to change course", warned Peccei.

The goal of the Key Point Dialog is to find a way to change course.



Important as it may be, the concern about the future has not been my main motivation for developing the Key Point Dialog. Rather, the reason was an attractive vision of a possible new Renaissance. To get a glimpse, imagine the spirit of the Renaissance transposed into our own time. Imagine a new way of thinking, a new set of values, a redirection of interests, a re-

invigoration of commerce, a revitalization of art, a rejuvenation of science, a liberation of creativity, a rebirth of enthusiasm...

The next Renaissance - a possible scenario

It is not difficult to imagine how the next Renaissance might realistically develop:

- A German quantum physicist looks at the developments in his field during the past century and concludes that it is not only the understanding of physical reality that has changed, but also the way of thinking about physical reality. He realizes that this new way of thinking might provide a basis for positive cultural change. He concludes emphatically: "We have to learn to think in a new way.
- An American dentistry professor investigates the roots of our toothaches and finds out that our nutrition is the underlying cause of quite a bit of suffering. He concludes that we have to learn to eat in a new way.
- An Israeli engineer investigates the roots of physical effort and finds that it is mainly due to patterns of muscular tension caused by inadequate body use. He realizes that, paradoxically, much of the technology which is believed to make our life easy actually makes the life more difficult, by inducing unnatural patterns of usage also known as 'stress'. He concludes that we have to learn to move in a new way.
- A Japanese martial art master explores the limits of his psycho-physical ability by using some little known techniques from Oriental traditions. He concludes that we need to learn to *be* in a new way.

Normally we would tend to ignore such aberrations. But what captivates our interest is that those examples fit so well together. If we would have earlier treated the reports about the unusual ability of the Japanese old man as pre-scientific, now, in the framework of new physics, they begin to make perfect sense. And if we would earlier disqualify the findings of our dentistry professor as non-scientific (everyone knows that tooth cavities are caused by bacteria), we now listen because we have learned that there is more than one *scientific* way of explaining things.

Closer inspection of the above examples brings to the surface an even more interesting similarity. Although disparate and heterogeneous, our four examples are results of questioning various facets of our cultural reality which were earlier taken for granted (our way of thinking, our way of eating, the way we use our body, our way of being). The question naturally comes to mind: Could it be that we have been systematically ignoring our culture, that we have been treating it as 'objective reality', as what Bourdieu called *doxa* (Bourdieu, 1977)? Could it be that by ignoring this pivotal aspect of our civilized condition, we have also failed to take real advantage of science and technology?

Seeking to find the ignored large insight which might reorient us in a new direction, we readily find it in—ourselves! Indeed, all along we have been believing that the world as we perceive it through our senses and the theories we create about it are objectively given. Now we realize that both

are our own creation. The simple error we have been making was to take ourselves out of the picture. The Key Point (yes, I am guessing that this will end up being our Key Point) turns out to be surprisingly simple. The runaway convict is found hiding in the police station, where nobody even thought of looking for him!

From this point on, the change develops naturally and rapidly. A large number of instances similar to the four mentioned ones are found to compose a new worldview. Innumerable new possibilities for creative change open up before us.

To illustrate those possibilities, I briefly mention one, related to an inexhaustible theme—love. While the preponderance of this theme in songs, movies and literature is indicative of its importance, experience shows that the promise of love often remains unfulfilled. It turns out that our new way of looking at things gives us also a new way of understanding the love theme. In addition to looking for the right partner or complaining about our existing one, we can now also look within and ask whether we indeed are *able to experience* the deep love which we so deeply desire. We can ask: What might the inability to feel love *feel* like? How can this ability be acquired? How can it be lost? By understanding the dynamics of love, we become able to adjust our behavior in a relationship accordingly. And also our behavior towards our children. This approach leads to more advanced alternatives to both traditional rules and modern lack of rules.

In a similar way we explore satisfaction, health, happiness... As our understanding of those qualities deepens, we become more able to embody them.

Artists explore new ways of being and express them in their art. Earlier works feel cold and lifeless compared to new art.

The general, popular mood also undergoes a deep change. We no longer worry about how to solve our new problems by thinking and acting in old ways. We enthusiastically realize that everything is now ready to change.

What retards the Renaissance

It is not difficult to see what hinders the above scenario from becoming reality:

- We are drowning in information. There are too many books, films, websites, scientific articles around for anyone to follow. None of us can even remotely hope to be able to find all the relevant pieces that are needed to begin the next Renaissance. Even less are we able to know if there have been disclaimers, if what we consider as solid facts might already have been disproved by someone, somewhere and sometime. The overload of information we are living in has already forced us to specialize. Paradoxically, the more we know collectively, the less any of us is able to know individually.
- Our attention is occupied by media information. The media bombard us with colorful images of spectacular daily events. This keeps us

preoccupied with problems in a way which obscures underlying dynamics and possible long-term solutions.

- We are influenced by advertising. The advertising impresses a new layer of colorful images upon our consciousness, tailored to keep our values and our desires in sync with commercial interests. I must emphasize that advertising is only the most visible side of a much deeper problem: Any major change in our values and consumption patterns would displace an equal amount of economic or political power. Naturally, the existing power structures resist such change.

Since we are now living in 'information jungle', it is no longer possible to be a Renaissance man. It is no longer possible, as da Vinci did in his time, to keep track of all what is happening in various regions of our fragmented culture, grasp how it can all be rearranged according to a simpler and more natural pattern, and then express this pattern through art, science, innovation and style.

But even if nobody can now be a new Leonardo, it might well still be possible to do what he did, if we do it—*together!*

Key point dialog - intuitive introduction

The purpose of the Key Point Dialog is to discover the Key Point and to express it in clear, convincing and accessible ways.

The Key Point is the point or insight which leads to radical direction change.

When written in small letters, the *key point dialog* refers to the communication technique that has been designed for the Key Point Dialog and other similar purposes.

The simple idea behind the *key point dialog* technique is that we can come out of the information jungle by climbing to a mountain top.

The *key point dialog* technique consists in essence in discovering the pieces which belong to the construction of the sought-for key point and then 'lifting them up' and making them visible. If you believe you are aware of some such piece, make it known to the dialog. Someone else will contribute another piece. The third person may combine those two pieces together into a larger insight. The fourth will express that insight by creating a painting, a poem or a video.

When suitable expressions of the Key Point have been developed, they can be used to

- Inspire, empower and unite.
- Direct efforts.
- Convince policy makers and voters.
- Secure sponsoring.
- Market new-direction products.

The key point dialog proceeds in two parallel ways, in physical space, and in cyberspace (on the Internet).

Physical space dialog

In physical space the key point dialog uses an adaptation of the *dialog* technique developed by physicist David Bohm (Bohm, 1996). The participants of the *dialog* take turns talking sincerely and freely, while others listen without interruption or judgment.

The *dialog* must be distinguished from the debate. Instead of trying to force their opinion on the group, the participants in a *dialog* support the collective creative process. As a medium for facilitating new ways of thinking, the *dialog* has a number of advantages:

- The *dialog* provides 'safe space'. As we learned through cognitive science (see, for ex. Damasio, 1994), new ideas must first pass through our 'body filter' before they can enter our conscious mind. It is in the safe space of the dialog, where we have heard other people talk sincerely and express similar thoughts, that we can become aware of ideas we did not even know we entertained. The dialog stimulates intuition and brings the participants into a creative state of mind.
- The *dialog* gives room for everyone to contribute. The group knows more than any single individual. In a *dialog*, the insights of the individuals can be combined into a larger insight.
- The *dialog* builds a community. While the fear of remaining alone may prevent us from changing the way we think and act, having a supportive community facilitates the *gestalt* change. The *dialog* brings the participants emotionally and ideologically closer together and creates the community which shares similar insights and values. The strength, knowledge and integrity of the participants inspire trust and commitment to the group and identification with group's values. Once the relationships have been developed, creative work can be taken up within small or larger groups.

The first physical Key Point Dialog has been organized in Zagreb on September 20, 2006 as cooperation of Europe House Zagreb and Sirion Center for Preservation of Health and Nature. Some 40 invited participants represented a variety of professions: academic (public health, physics, economics), business, media, NGOs, cultural activists and others.

Cyberspace dialog

The dialog on the Internet uses the same techniques and the same software (Mediawiki) which have proven to be effective in Wikipedia . For the purpose of the Key Point Dialog, we have created a similar wiki called WiKeyPoDia.

Compared to more conventional ways of communicating, the wiki technology offers several crucial advantages:

- The wiki democratizes information. The wiki technology enables a large community of people to co-create a document. This gives a sense of ownership, which is central. Steps are taken not to exclude anyone. Thereby the wiki becomes a true voice of the community.
- The wiki makes information reliable. Anyone who has objections to what is presented can edit the associated 'discussion' page or the article directly.
- The wiki makes information broad and solid, by taking in and re-adjusting a variety of backgrounds, mentalities and ways of looking.
- The wiki allows information to evolve. The creation of a new way of thinking and a new direction is a process, which should neither be speeded up or terminated. Unlike a newspaper or a research article, the wiki provides a permanent stage where the necessary 'digestion' or evolution of important ideas by the community can continue indefinitely.

There is, however, one crucial difference between Wikipedia and WiKeyPoDia: While the goal of Wikipedia is encyclopedic information, the goal of WiKeyPoDia is a single insight or point.

To understand this difference, and how it is reflected in WiKeyPoDia, some concepts and ideas from *information design* will be helpful.

A bit of theory

Polyscopy is the use of multiple ways of looking or *scopes* in *information design*. Different *scopes* lead to different *views*.

To understand the meaning and purpose of *scopes*, it is useful to imagine them as viewpoints on a mountain. *Low-level scopes* and *views* are like the views from the bottom of the mountain—one sees the details but not the big picture. The *high-level scopes* and *views* are opposite—one sees the forest but not the trees.

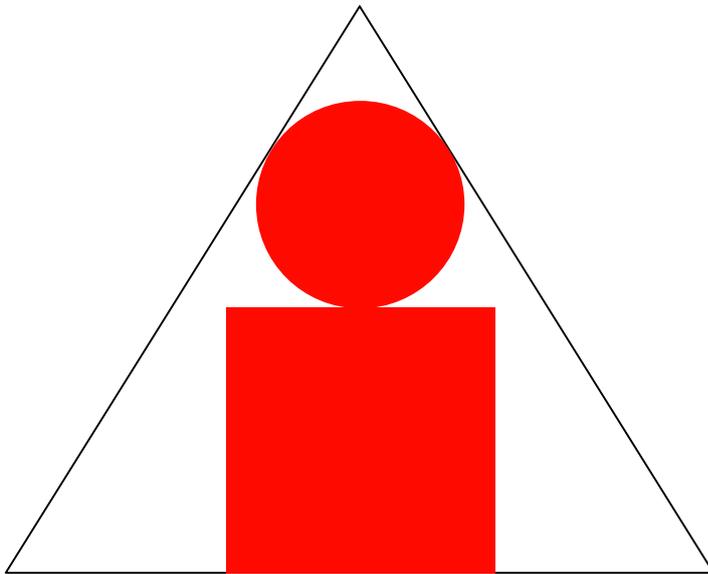
I use the triangle as ideogram to represent this hierarchy of *scopes* and the metaphorical mountain.

A key point can be metaphorically depicted as a view from a mountain top. In *polyscopy* this sort of view—the view of the situation as a whole, which provides right understanding and interpretation of the situation, is called *gestalt*.

As a passenger on a large cruise ship, you might well be interested in knowing the exact date of construction, the maximum number of passengers and the power and the principle of operation of the engine (or metaphorically, the sort of things that the sciences might be able to tell you). It might also be interesting to know the details of the love life of the captain and about other curious happenings on board (or metaphorically the sort of things that you would find in the media news). The interesting question, however, is whether all this together would be able to make you aware on time if your ship might be slowly—sinking.

'The ship is sinking' is an example of *gestalt*.

Since correct *gestalt* means both correct understanding and correct action, knowing the *gestalt* is equivalent to being informed (Karabeg, in preparation).



The above *ideogram* illustrates the information (represented by the 'i') which is suitable for conveying the *gestalt*. By composing the 'i' as a circle on top of a square it is suggested that the needed information consists of analytic and detailed *low-level* part (symbolized by the square) which shows all the main sides of the issue, and of a holistic and suggestive *high-level* part (represented by the circle) which conveys the *gestalt* in a nutshell. While the *gestalt* is communicated by suggestive, artistic, metaphorical techniques such as the ideogram (represented by the circle), it is founded in or made reliable by analytical, scientific reasoning (represented by the square).

In order to reach the *gestalt* or 'the mountain top', the *key point dialog* uses three kinds of abstraction called *horizontal*, *vertical* and *structural*.

The *horizontal abstraction*, represented by the square, provides breadth. We invite people from all backgrounds to contribute. Metaphorically, this allows us to 'survey the whole terrain', which is a characteristic of a mountain top view. *Horizontal abstraction* helps us identify and look at distinct sides or *aspects* of our issue.

The *vertical abstraction*, represented by the circle, takes us 'up'. *Low-level* pieces are merged together into a more general insight, a simple 'big picture'. *Vertical abstraction* helps us identify and 'bring up' what is essential and common.

The *structural abstraction*, represented by the triangle, provides a framework for organizing the pieces produced by the other two kinds of abstraction and for bringing them into relationships with each other. The *structural abstraction* tells us how the pieces fit together to compose the whole.

Putting it all together

We can now understand the *key point dialog* as a technique for creating *gestalts*. Metaphorically, we may think of the dialog as a collective journey to a mountain top.

We proceed 'up the mountain' by identifying some important pieces in the 'information jungle', by 'lifting them up' one by one in order to make them visible, and then by combining them together to create broader or more fundamental insights. We proceed in this way until an over-arching *gestalt* or 'mountain top view' is reached. Once we have an initial *gestalt*, we carefully collect both the data which support it or contradict it, aiming at a clear, reliable and complete mountain top view.

The physical dialog and the online dialog complement and support one another.

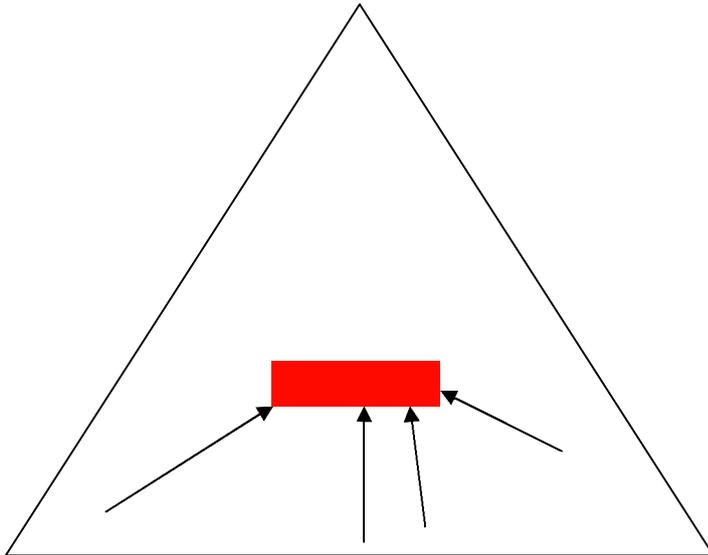
In the collective creative process that the key point dialog enacts, the physical dialog may be compared to taking a walk in nature to reflect freely and get fresh new ideas, while the online dialog is similar to consulting literature and writing.

A lot might be said about the advantages of face-to-face communication. The physical dialog can break the ice and engage people. The physical dialog may also include those people who don't use the Internet. Portions of the online dialog may be recorded, edited and shown online.

On the other hand, the online dialog can help the physical dialog. The awareness that nothing really needs to be produced right there and then helps the physical dialog follow its spontaneous and intuitive course. The material assembled on WiKeyPoDia naturally helps the participants prepare for the physical dialog. They can see whether they agree with what is already there, come up with new ideas, and test their ideas in conversation with the group before placing them online.

Why conventional techniques tend to fail

The following *ideogram* illustrates the conventional way of communicating the message about the need for radical direction change (by writing a book, an article or a manifesto): Multiple *low-level* insights are condensed together into a verbal, rational, cryptic, black-and-white, rectangular message.



This approach has at least two disadvantages:

- It fails to give the details based on which the conclusions are drawn (the square). Because of that, it also fails to convince.
- It fails to give a suggestive, colorful message which can 'move us', which we can relate to (the circle). Consequently, it doesn't really communicate the 'big picture' either.

It may be interesting to notice that the media informing, whose survival depends on engaging the reader's attention, usually proceeds in the opposite way - a report as a rule begins with a picture, often accompanied with a real-life, personal story, which quickly establishes the right emotional rapport and builds various contextual bridges which are needed for communication. In this article I have improvised a similar approach by talking about Aurelio Peccei.

I have in several occasions used a slide with Camel Joe cigarette advertising to illustrate the fact that while our 'official culture' (ethics, education, legislation) focuses on square, black-and-white explicit verbal messages (represented by Surgeon General's warning), we are culturally dominated by the visual, the implicit and the 'cool'.

For centuries, the Catholic Church has commissioned artists to communicate its message. But our futurologists, our scientists and our educators have been conspicuously slow in doing that. While our think tanks and our academics might now be desperately trying to communicate their key points in terms of words and numbers, today's Michelangelos may be in the service of Nike and Coca Cola, re-inforcing different messages.

The WiKeyPoDia provides room for both scientists (in an area called SQUARE) and the artists (in an area called CIRCLE) to contribute.

Other applications of the *key point dialog* technique

In addition to the Key Point Dialog, two applications of the *key point dialog* technique are under development.

The European Dialog is the key point dialog adapted for the needs of the European Commission and the European Movement International. This project has been initiated by Renata Bacic, who leads the European Movement in Croatia and who hosted the first Key Point Dialog in Zagreb in her center. She noticed that the same technique may also be exactly what is needed in the European context.

Following the negative votes on European constitution in France and Netherlands, and opinion polls which showed a decline of interest in the European cause, the EC initiated a period of 'soul-searching'. A so-called Plan D (for Democracy, Dialog and Debate) was initiated which focuses on communication with the electorate.

The communication challenge, however, might be more interesting and deeper than perceived. For the people who represent and promote the European cause, the 'brand Europe' stands for the forefront of civilization, democracy and culture. But the direction of European civilization is, as we have seen, now being put into question. At the same time, the European social democracy is being challenged by globalization. The interesting question is whether Europe can once again find a direction which inspires enthusiasm and live up to her brand.

New thinking is needed. It is not difficult to see that our conventional ways of communicating such as polls and public debates will tend to amplify old and already prevailing streams of thought and *repress* subtle and still weak new voices. Renata Bacic noticed that the *key point dialog* is needed in order to allow the creative, new impulses to emerge and become visible, and then to be tested and amplified through community interaction.

The Kommune Dialog or Kommunewiki is a similar initiative started by Tor Næss and Øyvind Sørbrøden in Norway. They observed that the key point dialog can be used to place the key question of values and direction into Norwegian public space. Norway has in recent years become a rich country. But even a rich country can easily be steered through implicit values (such as the 'cash value') into a direction which its people would not consciously choose. The idea of the Kommune Dialog is to allow the people in the Norwegian municipality to consciously decide how they want to use their resources. The prospects are exciting—what could be a better place to anchor our key question than the Norwegian municipality which, as its Norwegian name 'kommune' suggests, is the very cell of the Norwegian social-democratic organism! The Kommune Dialog proceeds in two phases, where the goal of the first phase is to choose a direction, while the second phase is about selecting concrete measures which are needed in order to implement the chosen direction in the municipality.

On January 18, 2007, we presented the Kommune Wiki project to the municipality leadership in Bø, Telemark, who received it with enthusiasm. For me the peak moment was when Tor Næss, bright and agile 75-year old retired professor of Telemark University College, explained the horizontal, vertical and structural abstraction to Bø municipality leaders, who nodded their heads in approval. The relation between *polyscopy* (ability to 'climb to

a mountain top') and democracy (ability to consciously and freely choose the direction) seemed obvious to everyone.

Key Point Dialog as example of *information design*

We are now ready to see what the presented example tells us about *information design*.

By definition, *information design* means *designing* the way we communicate instead of taking it for granted. And that is exactly what we did when we created the key point dialog technique.

In *information design* we don't just give a speech or write a book or a manifesto. We don't automatically rely on the methods and areas of interest of physics, philosophy and other traditional academic disciplines. Neither do we rely on the language and method of a journalist, or any other traditional profession. We *design*! (*Design* here means 'adjusting to the purpose', as distinguished from automatic inheritance and imitation of existing patterns, which characterizes the *tradition*, see Karabeg, 2005.)

While *designing* communication, we combine modern information technology (in the presented example Mediawiki and Internet), insights about the nature of cognition and communication, methodological ideas (represented here by *polyscopy*) and insights into existing communication needs. We make bridges across divided professions and disciplines, and we develop methods for expressing the key insights in ways which can reach and move people.

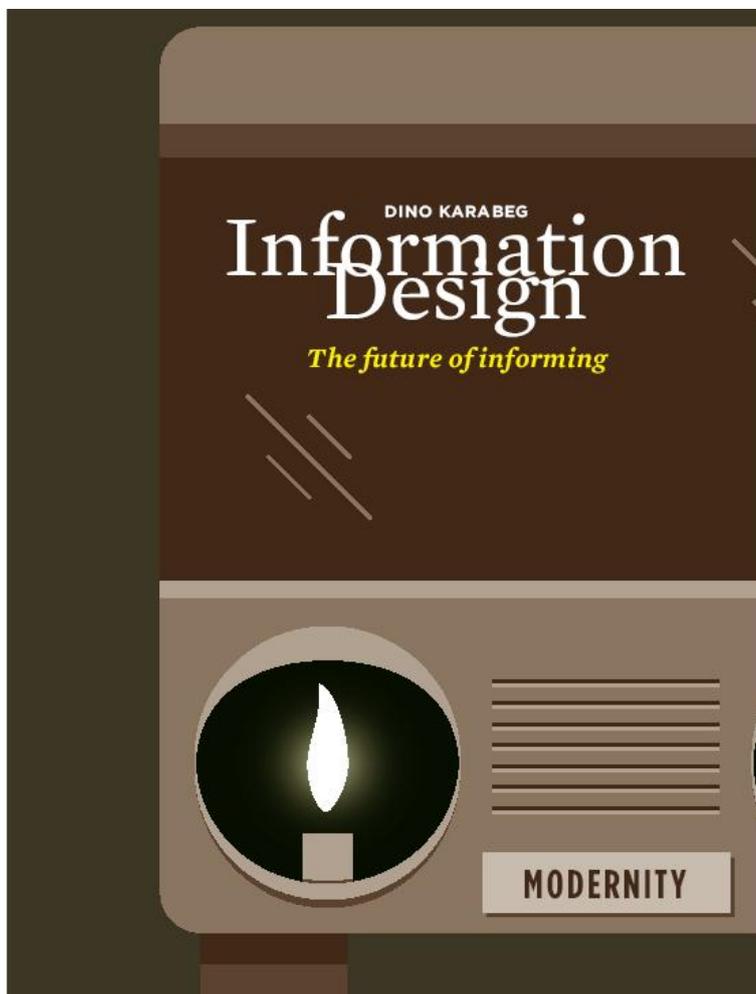
In more concrete terms, *information design* is a space in reality (an academic discipline, a profession) where this new way of working with information can be developed and practiced. By lifting the confinements of traditional disciplines and methods and allowing the researcher to choose both the subject and the method *by design*, *information design* provides an academic creative zone where new ideas and approaches, the ones that are needed for the on-going cultural renewal, can be developed.

The difference between Wikipedia and WiKeyPoDia illustrates the difference between *traditional informing* and *information design*:

- Even when it uses modern technology and an advanced communication scheme, the Wikipedia is still constructing a traditional document, namely an encyclopedia. WiKeyPoDia creates a *designed* document structure in order to meet a need.
- The goal of Wikipedia is to cover the whole map of knowledge. Every piece is of similar value, like a piece in a puzzle. The goal of WiKeyPoDia is to reach a single insight or *gestalt*. Details are selected according to their relevance for the key insight.
- The underlying idea of what information is all about is different: In Wikipedia (and in *traditional informing*) the purpose of information is to describe reality. In WiKeyPoDia (and in *information design*) the purpose of information is to inform (tell us what we most need to know).

The Key Point Dialog example can be read as an argument or even as a 'proof' that *information design* is necessary. (Even when introducing my work by a story, I still cannot help acting as a theoretical scientist, albeit in a bit devious way...) The summary of the argument is as follows:

- The *gestalt* or the 'mountain top view' is the benchmark which we may use to decide whether the present *informing* functions or not. Indeed, without knowing the *gestalt* we can neither make sense of the data in a right way, nor choose an appropriate course of action.
- Our *traditional* ways of informing are not suitable for *gestalt* creation. We are not even aware that *gestalt* might be an issue. Gestalt information, like the one presented to us by Peccei, does not really reach us. Because of that, we might be on a destructive course and have no way to see that there is a much better direction to follow.
- Our discussion shows that to find a solution, we must communicate in a new way. A solution must involve a combination of methodological ideas, new technology and insights from distinct areas of knowledge. In other words, to find a way change course, *information design* must be used.



I summarize my discussion with the help of the above *ideogram*, which I usually use to introduce *information design*. The *ideogram* is here shown on the cover of the book (designed by Fredrik Eive Refsli) which is being prepared for the same purpose.

The caption of this *ideogram* reads ‘*Modern culture with traditional informing is like a bus with candle headlights*’. The *ideogram* suggests that *information design* has become necessary in order to use all our other resources meaningfully and safely.

What is so good about information design

I conclude with a few words of explanation why I am so enthusiastic about *information design*.

- *Information design* can make a large practical difference, as we have just seen. At the same time,
- *Information design* may be considered as academically fundamental, in the sense in which mathematics and physics, and earlier philosophy, were considered as fundamental.
- *Information design* is broad. There is room for just about any conceivable talent, background and ambition: visual design and art, theoretical work, epistemological analysis, information technology, social action, new directions in business.
- *Information design* is fun! When we audaciously remove the borderlines between disciplines and create an ‘academic creative zone’, the first thing that moves in is of course—creativity. And when we work creatively and freely exploring new academic and cultural frontiers, *aren’t we then already living in the Renaissance?*

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