

DESCRIBING TRANSCULTURAL ACTIVITY IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE SYSTEMIC VIEW

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to describe one arena that we have found productive to transcultural activity in the framework of the systemic view. We shall fulfill this aim in four parts. In the first section, we define two concepts, cultural and national, and some derivatives which follow from them. In the second section, we suggest a systemic approach of application for this conceptual scheme. In the third section, we describe one exemplary arena of our transcultural activity, which has drawn us together. And in the last section, we convey our perceptions and critical views toward our work, all of which we hope are of value to those interested and engaged in such activities.

1. Definition of Terms

On the next page in Table 1 we define the two central concepts of our paper, *cultural* and *national*, which help us to understand the implications of our activity with many colleagues from different cultures and nations. From these two elementary definitions, we derive eight others: *multicultural*, *multinational*, *intracultural*, *intranational*, *intercultural*, *international*, *transcultural*, and *transnational*. These definitions are reproduced from [8].

2. Developing a Systemic View of TC and TN Activity

The progression shown in Table 1 may be seen to parallel the systemic view of hierarchically organized systems [4, 5, 6] and more contemporary theoretical innovations [2, 3]. One may begin by defining a set of elements that comprise a whole, the set. Inclusion of the interactions among the elements make visible the more dynamic wholeness of the system; that is, the set may transform from a set to a system. Several examples of this distinction and transformation are shown in Table 2. The contents of Table 2 is taken from [7].

Other kinds of illustrations often make the point too, for example, the ingredients in a pot of water are transformed by the chef into a soup through the process of cooking, and the separate colors applied to the canvas are combined by the artist into a composition through the process of painting.

Furthermore, a set of such systems may be described in terms of their intersystemic communications. The wholeness of the superordinate system therefore becomes more visible upon describing these interactions. There is an apparent transformation from a disparate set of dynamic systems into a more complex superordinate system [4, 6]. Some contrasts of this secondary transformation following from Table 2 are presented in Table 3.

Table 1.
Definitions of Cultural and National Events.

Cultural (C) — the collective products, services, and tools provided by a group of persons who have in common generally the same customs, history, language, traditions, and values.

National (N) — a geographical region governed by an autonomous political system.

Multicultural (MC) — set of products, services, and tools present within the contributing cultures.

Multinational (MN) — set of products, services, and tools present within the contributing nations.

Intracultural (AC) — movement and communication of products, services, and tools within one culture that maintains its separate identity.

Intranational (AN) — movement and communication of products, services, and tools within one nation that maintains its separate identity.

Intercultural (IC) — movement and communication of products, services, and tools between different cultures that maintain their separate identities.

International (IN) — movement and communication of products, services, and tools between different nations that maintain their separate identities.

Transcultural (TC) — movement and communication of products, services, and tools out of one culture and into another culture that may change as a consequence.

Transnational (TN) — movement and communication of products, services, and tools out of one nation and into another nation that may change as a consequence.

Taken as a collective, the conceptual scheme shown in Table 1 has several systemic implications. For example, each prefix (multi, intra, inter, and trans) defines a perspective, which may be adopted for the study of the interrelations among cultural and national entities. Each perspective may be taken as the chief point of reference, or vantage point, from which to view all cultural and national activities and events. We can apply the perspectives defined in Table 1 to Figure 1, which shows eight satellites (four cultural and four national) orbiting the globe of human world activities and events. The eight perspectives may be focused like search lights on any geographical area of the global surface. The schematic is meant to convey these possibilities, namely, two or more perspectives may be converged on the global surface to describe the cultural and national activities and events thereby circumscribed.

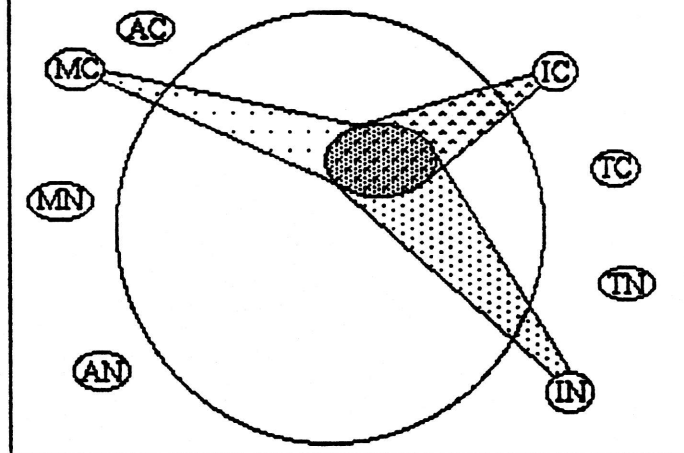
Table 2.
Contrasts between Set and System.

SETS	SYSTEMS
a group of football players	a football team
a corpse	a living body
a group of employees	a firm
a set of planets	a solar system
a group of students	a class

Table 3.
Contrasts between Set and System.

SUBORDINATE SYSTEMS	SUPERORDINATE SYSTEM
two football teams	a football game
a set of bodies	a group of persons
a set of firms	corporate marketplace
solar systems	a galaxy
classes	a school

Figure 1.
Globe of Cultural and National Activities and Events.



On the one hand, when each perspective is developed to an extreme, it may help us to understand ideological stances sometimes taken by specific individuals, organizations, and governments toward an ethnic minority or a disadvantaged nation for example. On the other hand, when the perspectives are developed to an interdependent unity, it may suggest to us a more systemic analysis of circumstances and predicaments that a group of cultures and nation states face together in our increasingly more complex world. Such a span of various possibilities between the extremes of this bipolarity is one rationale for the next section.

3. An Arena of Collaborative Activity

Just as the periodic congregation of the European Systems Union is an arena for collaborative activity, we can now report on our progress in that collaborative arena we call the Human Science Research Seminar [1], held for one week each summer at Castel Ivano in Strigno, Italy. This annual event transpires in the IC framework, as defined in Table 1; nevertheless, we have attempted to foster both TC and TN perspectives, particularly through our focus on human-oriented research projects. The event convenes the combined efforts of the 12-18 participants, 2-3 facilitators and, the on-site staff of the facility. Thematic emphasis on a systemic approach varies each year to the study and applications of human-oriented research methods. The seminar process involves group and individual activities, demonstrations, discussions, and reports of research and book writing projects, and in general any kind of collaborative scientific inquiry intended that attempts to use a systemic view.

Table 4.

Benefits and Limitations of the Systemic View Discovered through Participation in the "Human Science International Seminar: A Systemic Approach to Disciplined Inquiry."

- ⊃ The systemic view is needed more than ever before to examine and study the increasingly more complex problems brought about by human proclivity.
- ⊃ However, systemics itself must be studied carefully much more than it is.
- ⊃ Continued advancements in methodology are key to meet the challenges of increased complexity.
- ⊃ The systemic view of the 1950s-1970s may not help us much in the 1990s, for the former may be more introductory than substantively revolutionary for what we need today.
- ⊃ One of the greatest services we can provide is the *careful* and *responsible* education of the next generation to enable them to carry and ameliorate our current problems and circumstances.
- ⊃ Although widely shared and largely implicit, the systemic view has yet to develop an agreed upon, communicable, and public knowledge base; it has yet to prove or disprove itself; and it is widely misunderstood.
- ⊃ Working together in small groups which apply concretely systemic concepts and principles, is an excellent means to model as well as foster the more systemic human-oriented processes of cooperative and collaborative activity.
- ⊃ Metaphor is a powerful methodological component of systemic collaboration.
- ⊃ Language can be a barrier to communication and collaboration, but it need not be.
- ⊃ Collaborative activity is facilitated in a habitat consisting of supportive respectful persons working cooperatively amidst aesthetic pleasing surroundings.

4. Critique and Implications

Over the seven consecutive years of the seminar, it has provided an educational service to graduate students (the next generation of researchers) as well as contributed to the professional development and career advancement of colleagues.

Some inferences, which represent our reflections and insights from the seminar, are summarized in Table 4 on the previous page. These points are reflections and insights coming out of the seminars, which help to inspire and guide us in our efforts to make our collaboration productive and contributive to our respective fields of study and to those who come to study with us.

It is to be remarked that a productive collaboration happens to be possible if and only if the members of a group constitute a system and not simply a sum of individualities. This implies that each member must be open to communication. In other words, each person must have the wish to communicate, even if the messages received could force the revision of one's own ideas, value system, and *Weltanschauung*.

Often communication is only apparent, because each member of the group understands, of the received messages, only that part which matches his or her value system. This situation could be overcome by creating suitable conditions, in order that the group can behave like an open system. This implies a facilitation of the exchanges of a different nature between persons, and between the participants to the group activity and the external world.

Conclusion

The convergence of a group of persons with a common interest can discover a basis for collaboration. This group creates a clearing or space, in which the process for fruitful collaboration may unfold. The dynamics of this human activity may be viewed from various perspectives (Table 1). The seminar [1] has been for us one example of this phenomenon. It is out of this process of collaborative activity that we have discovered and come to know several benefits and limitations of the systemic view (Table 4).

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