

A Quest for Collaborators in

- (i) Generating a socio-cybernetically-based contribution to Adam Smith's quest for a design for a society which will innovate and learn without central direction.**
- (ii) Mapping (and finding ways of harnessing or intervening in) the network of social forces which have the future of mankind and the planet in their grip.**

John Raven
30 Great King St.,
EDINBURGH EH3 6QH

Website: eyeonsociety.co.uk

Version date: 31 August 2013

The Problem.

The problem to be addressed has been highlighted by *The Committee on the Political Economy of the Good Society* (PEGS) in the formal statement below. However, a worrying insight into its intractability comes from the fact that, in the 20 years that PEG's journal, *The Good Society*, has been in publication, virtually no progress has been made.

PEG's statement reads:

(There is widespread recognition that) many of the major problems facing today's societies reflect existing political and economic structures and cannot be resolved without significant changes to these underlying institutional arrangements. Such problems as increasing disparities in economic and political power, environmental damage, welfare dependency, growing bureaucratization, and political alienation can be seen as inherent features of existing institutional arrangements that the institutions themselves help to propagate.

Nevertheless, institutional analysis and reform currently receive little attention, and existing political and economic theories offer insufficient guidance on how alternative institutional arrangements might avoid or reduce these major social problems.

Cybernetics is concerned with the study and design of governance systems in animals and machines. One has to mention the animals to underline that cybernetics includes the study and design of complex organic systems that have multiple feedback loops¹.

¹ Because he overlooked this, Bertalanffy argued that it is inappropriate to adopt a cybernetic model when seeking to understand the social forces which control the operation of society.

So *socio* cybernetics is concerned with the study of the feedback systems which control the operation of society ... and the design of better ones.

My quest here² is to find collaborators who both identify with PEG's objectives and who are interested in mapping the socio-cybernetic feedback processes which control the operation of modern societies and designing a better public management system.

More specifically, I am interested in identifying collaborators who are able to devote time and energy to either contributing directly to this process by building on work we have already done or who are able to help us secure the funding required to do so³.

Background.

Briefly, our work on the educational system⁴ unexpectedly threw light on the topics identified in the title.

That work, and its implications for the two topics we are now seeking to progress, is briefly summarised in an article entitled *Advancing and defeating the PEGS agenda: Socio-Cybernetics and Murray Bookchin* in PEG's journal, *The Good Society*. The article is available at <http://eyeonsociety.co.uk/resources/GS09.pdf>

That research showed that, while there are multiple reasons⁵ why the educational system fails to achieve its manifest goals⁶, these various processes do not operate independently but form a mutually supporting, autopoietic, self-elaborating, and self-extending (viz organic) system.

A systemogram mapping these interactions is shown in Figure 1.

² I have previously tried to progress this work at meetings of both RC51 and SCiO.

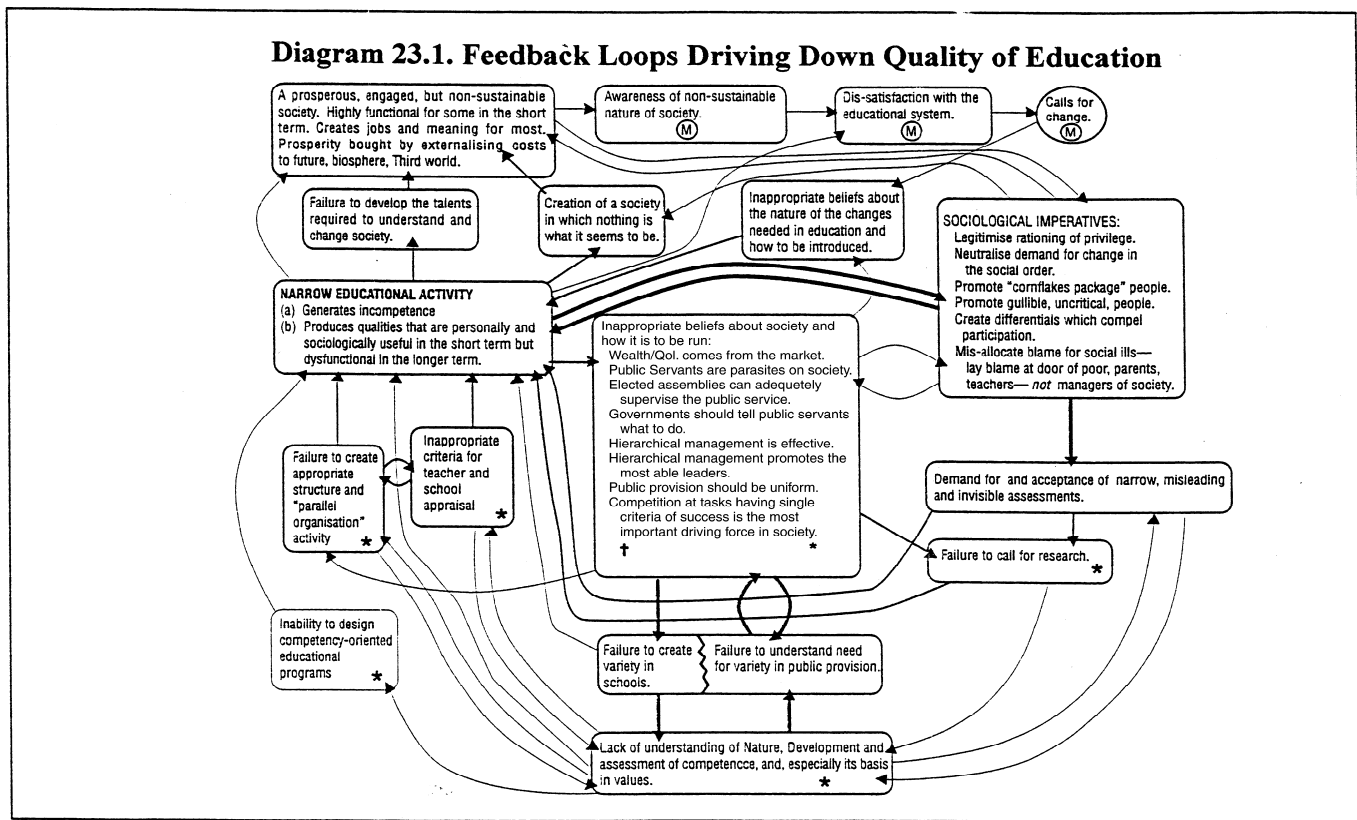
³ The process of securing funding is not limited to securing funding to progress a proposal to be put forward by us. In fact, I have, in the past, never been able to do this. Virtually all my work has been done by arranging to include relevant research within a programme of work being commissioned by others for other purposes.

⁴ See, for example, http://eyeonsociety.co.uk/resources/fulllist.html#managing_education

⁵ See, for example, http://eyeonsociety.co.uk/resources/fulllist.html#managing_education or http://eyeonsociety.co.uk/resources/CPDAPA_REVISIED_FULL_VERSION.pdf for lists of these reasons

⁶ So far as we can make out, it achieves its latent *sociological* goals (mainly legitimising and implementing the rationing of privilege) very well. Indeed it is these that dominate the system.

FIGURE 1 (Previously Diagram 23.1).



* Intervention in these cells would help change the nature of the qualities nurtured and rewarded in the system. Motives which could be harnessed to do this are marked (M).

† These need to be replaced by acceptance of the need to make managed economies work—to find ways of giving effect to information concerning the public long term interest, the need to explicitly create variety and information on the personal and social consequences of the options, and to find ways of holding public servants accountable for, and getting them to act in, the long term public interest. This means systematic, broadly-based, evaluation and participative democracy.

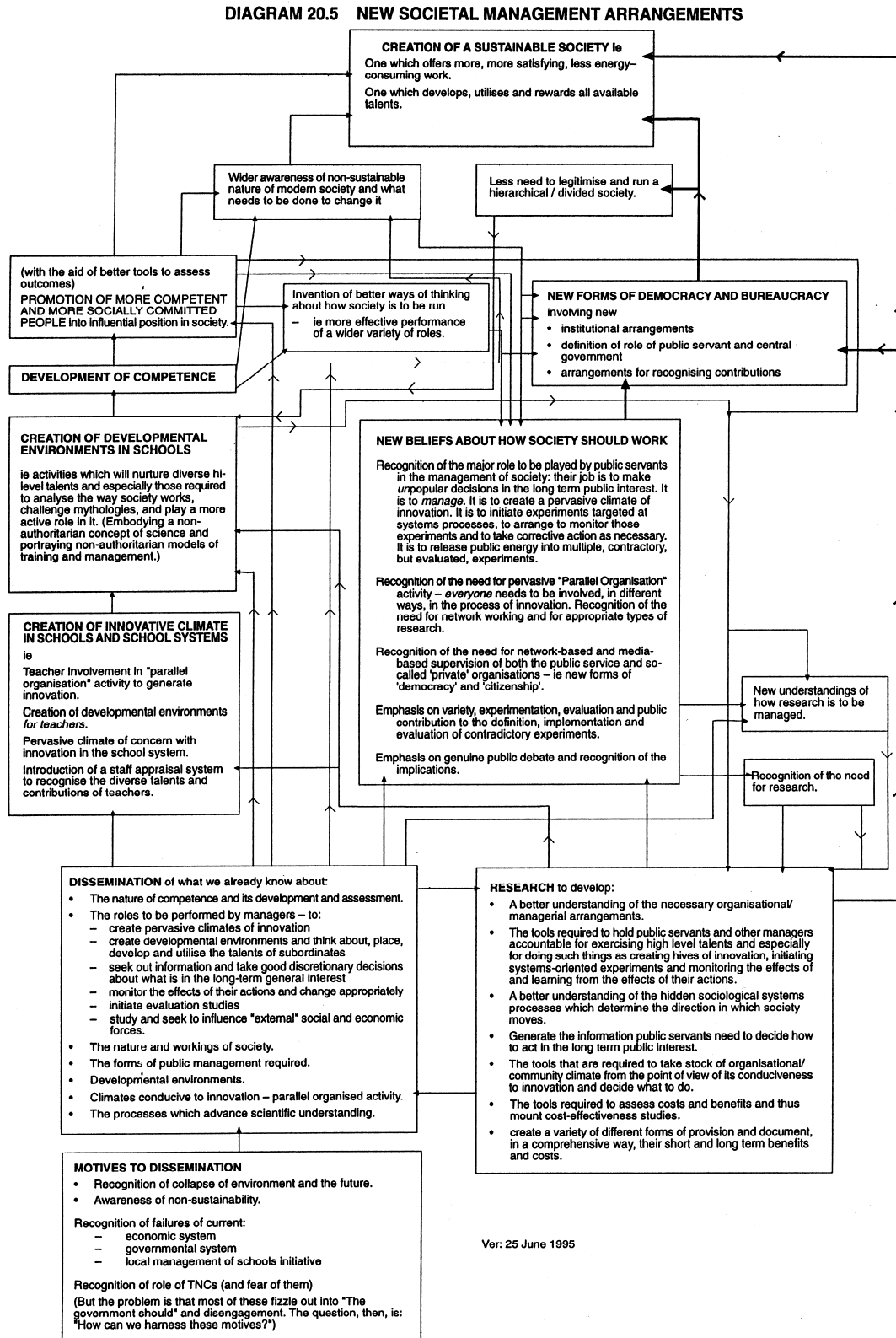
Figure 1 makes it very clear that, while numerous developments are required, two of the central problems are: (i) to design a better public management (socio-cybernetic) system for society (viz an alternative to the notions captured in the central box in Figure 1). And (ii) to map and understand the (“sociological”) forces which primarily determine what happens both within the educational system and, indeed, the operation of the formal governance (“democratic”/bureaucratic) system itself (right hand box in Figure 1).

Current position.

On the basis of the understanding we built up in the course of this work, we have taken Smith’s quest seriously and generated a design for a public management system markedly different from both currently accepted public management models – namely the “market” and “democratic”⁷. This is condensed into the systemogram shown in Figure 2.

⁷ A fuller discussions of this system will be found in my *New Wealth of Nations: the Societal Management Arrangements required for a Sustainable society* http://eveonsociety.co.uk/resources/fulllist.html#new_wealth

Figure 2 (previously Diagram 20.5)



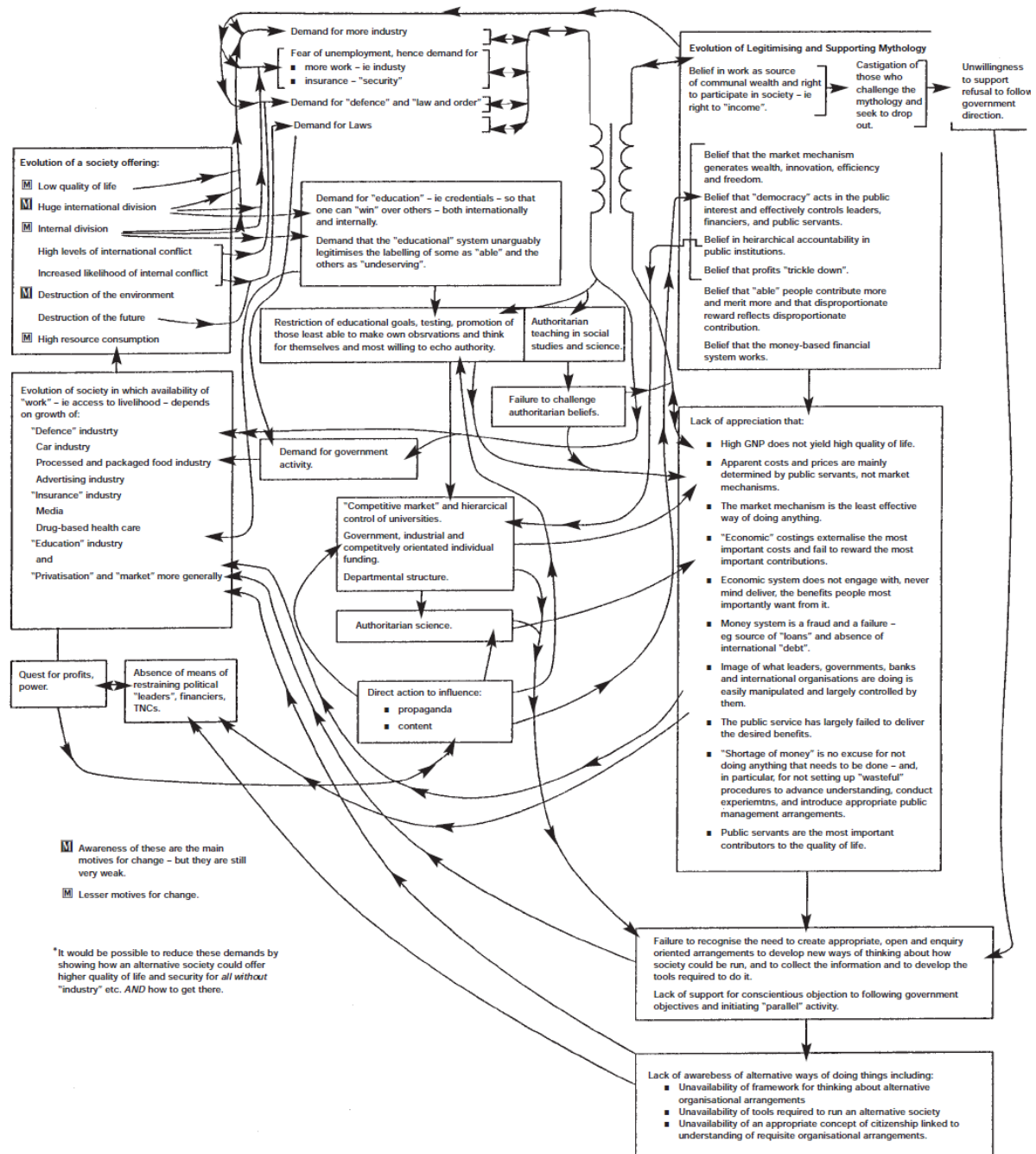
Likewise we have generated a model/systemogram of the network of social forces which appear to have the future of mankind and the planet in their grip⁸ (Fig 3).

⁸ Since this was produced, the work of Bookchin on the central role of a system which legitimises and enforces hierarchy via the creation of endless senseless work has become much more central to our thinking (see <http://eyeonsociety.co.uk/resources/Bookchin.pdf>). As Bookchin's work shows, this network of social forces has eliminated all previous demonstrations (deliberately generated over the centuries) of the value and viability of more organic, non-hierarchical, management arrangements.

Figure 3 (Previously Diagram 20.6)

Diagram 20.6

Feedback loops perpetuating non-sustainable society



Version date: 8 September 2004. John Doctemp/Jean ODDMENTS file: FLPNS.***

The task now is to undertake the Herculean⁹ task of translating these and related systemograms into socio-cybernetic maps (or dynamic systems models) of the operative forces.

⁹ The task is of similar magnitude to that which Newton undertook by conceptualising the invisible forces that control the operation of sailing boats and the planets and showing how they could be mapped and measured.

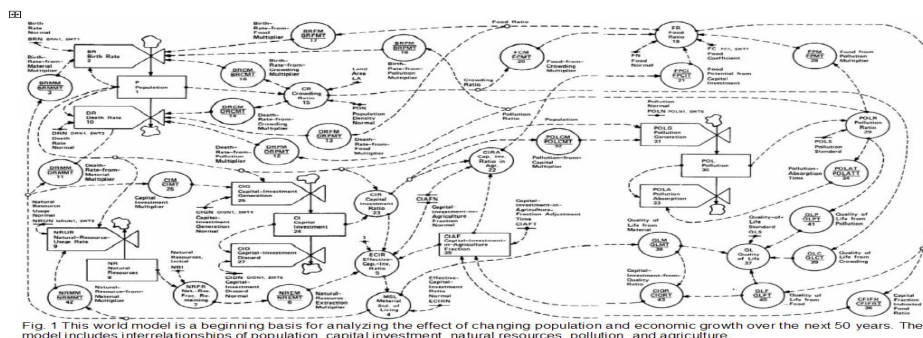
Why translate the systemograms into socio-cybernetic models?

Problems with systemograms include their failure to: (i) give any indication of the relative strength of the various forces involved; (ii) highlight nodes at which intervention could most profitably be made; and (iii) make it possible to assess the probable effects of any particular intervention.

One illustration of the kind of dynamic systems map or model that might be envisaged is given in Figure 4.

Figure 4.

Forrester's World Model.



It is possible to see the effects of any intervention one may propose to make in this network by going to www.Vensim\models\sample\WRLD3-003\World3_03_Scenarios.wmfView

Last major leap forward.

The transformation in our thinking which has already stemmed from Luciano Gallon's inducement to embark on this adventure will be found in Raven and Gallon¹⁰

The procedures required to take the work forward have been outlined by Albin¹¹.

I would love to hear from anyone interested in progressing this work and would greatly appreciate it if they would contact me at jraven@ednet.co.uk.

¹⁰ Raven & Gallon <http://eyeonsociety.co.uk/resources/scio.pdf>

¹¹ Albin, S. (1997, 2012). *Building a System Dynamics Model Part 1: Conceptualization* (D-4597). A series of papers on the process of model-building starts with the first stage: conceptualization. <http://clexchange.org/ftp/documents/Roadmaps/RM8/D-4597.pdf>