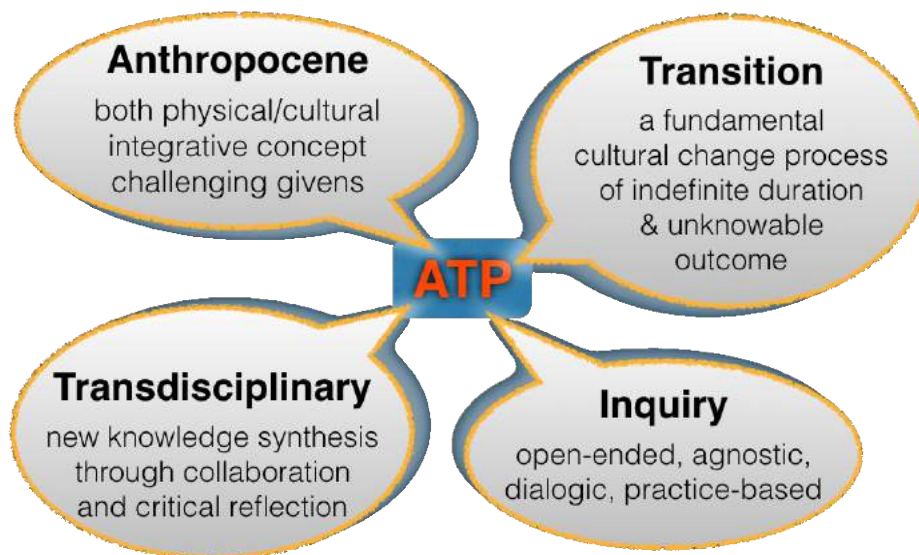


Anthropocene Transition Project

This Changes Everything: Professional and Social Practice in the Anthropocene

The title of Naomi Klein's acclaimed book on the politics of climate change well sums up the challenge of the Anthropocene. The arrival of the age when human activity has come to dominate and seriously compromise the stability of the Earth System poses fundamental questions for our professions, key cultural, social and economic institutions, our communities, and our systems of governance. In Klein's words, *this changes everything*.

This is why the UTS Business School is hosting the **Anthropocene Transition Project (ATP)** in 2016. The project's aim is to link Anthropocene-related research with specific areas of professional and social practice in order to explore the nature of the changes required by the Anthropocene Transition.



Four key concepts for the Anthropocene Transition Project

Shaping a Future We Want?

Today we stand poised on the cusp of a historical transition, most likely extending over multiple generations, in which human societies must find ways to adjust to radically different environmental conditions and accomplish far-reaching social, economic, political and cultural changes.

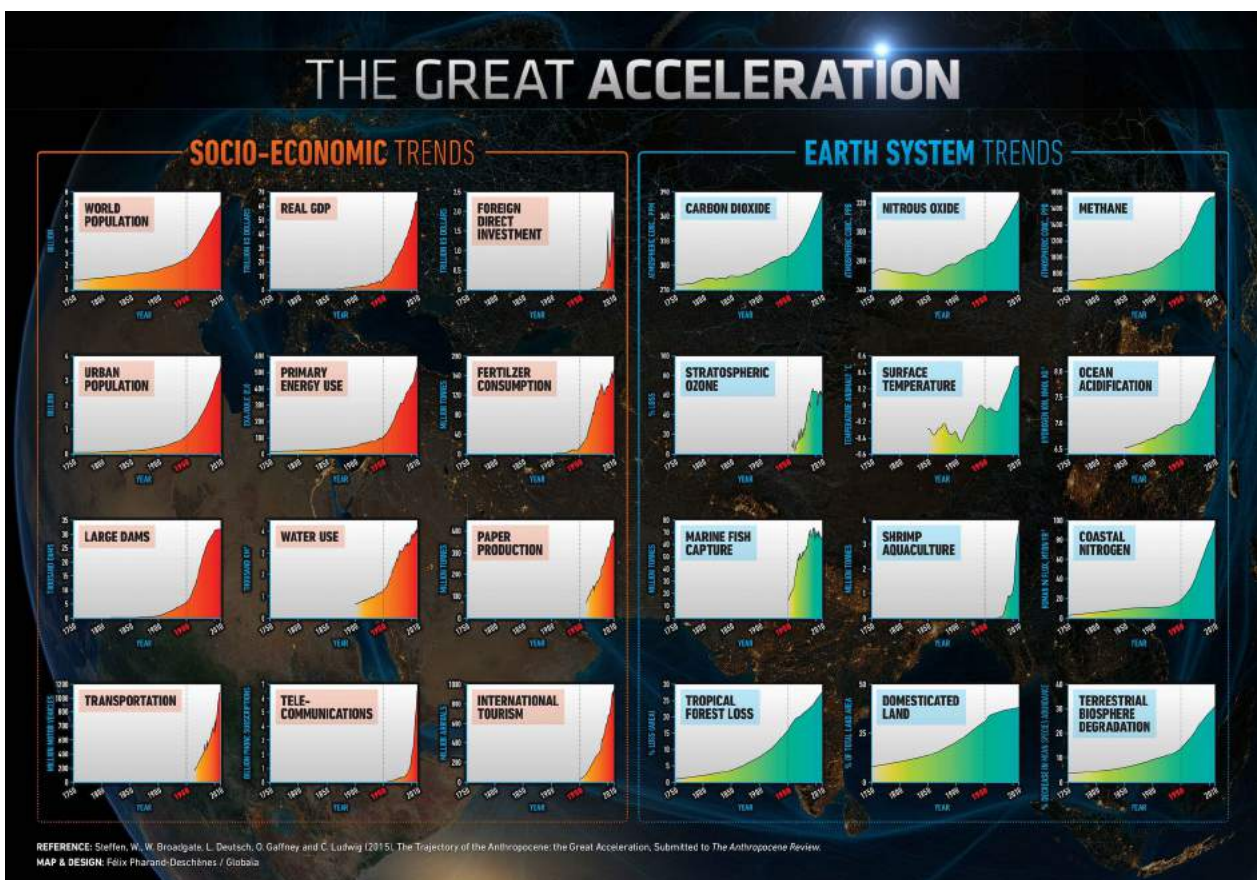
Mitigating our dangerous disruption of the biosphere and **adapting** to the profound mutations we have already built into the Earth System are now urgent priorities for all humanity. But what we could call 'Anthropocene thinking' looks beyond mitigation and adaptation to consider the **transformation** of the globally dominant but seriously dysfunctional 'advanced' human cultures. This is the central task humanity must accomplish in the Anthropocene Transition. It is a transition

away from professional and social practices and their underpinning cultural values that are **fundamentally at odds with the continuing viability of our species and many others as well.**

Our 'professional and social practices' are all the activities, both paid and unpaid, in which specialised and tacit knowledge and skills are used to achieve socially and culturally valued outcomes. These activities are often collaborative in nature and usually involve some degree of critical reflection and collective learning. 'Professional and social communities of practice' refers to the networks that link people involved in common or similar activities. It is through these activities and networks that most of us participate in continuously reproducing and reinventing the institutions and values of our society. **These are the ways in which we all most directly contribute to shaping the future.**

One Earth System

The term '**Anthropocene**' arose from the Earth sciences and has been widely adopted across the social sciences and humanities. While the Industrial Revolution began the rapid expansion of a powerful, increasingly globalised, industrial civilisation based on the exploitation of fossil fuels, it was the 1950s that saw the start of '**the Great Acceleration**' – exponential growth in energy use, industrial output, consumption, population, and eco-system disruption, the unleashing of nuclear power, and a flood of fossil-fuel based plastics and chemicals into the environment.



The Great Acceleration: Earth System disruption driven by cultural forces
Planetary boundaries graphic: Globaia and Stockholm Resilience Centre - <http://www.stockholmresilience.org>

In the Anthropocene human activity is outstripping the biosphere's capacity to maintain the relative stability we've known during our species' long journey through the Holocene. Our impacts are pushing the Earth System towards rapid, unpredictable and potentially catastrophic state changes beyond the evolutionary experience of both humans and many other species.

'Anthropocene' is a powerfully integrative concept. It draws together our thinking about specific aspects of Earth System disruption — like climate change or biodiversity loss or ocean acidification — to focus on their interconnections and their cultural drivers. By directing our attention to **whole system dynamics**, it encourages us to see the Earth as a **single socio-ecological system**.

The Anthropocene concept has far-reaching ethical implications. It challenges us to accept **an** expanded understanding of collective responsibility that reaches beyond conventional human scales measured in multiples of human lifetimes, to consider the consequences of our collective actions on **planetary and geological (or deep time) scales**.

While it is the physical sciences that have revealed the enormity of our impacts on the planet, the concept of 'Anthropocene' helps us to broaden our focus to include the **cultural drivers of this disruption** — deep conflict between the core values of a dominant global monoculture and the life support systems of Earth. As Swedish scholar Steven Hartman puts it: "The great environmental predicament of the early 21st century is not primarily an ecological crisis, though its ramifications are far-reaching within ecological systems. **Rather it is a crisis of culture.**"

Four domains of cultural action/inquiry and associated core values



The globally dominant industrial growth economies operate as if reality is about organising inert matter in efficient ways to satisfy human needs and wants and generate surplus value. This cultural ‘operating system’ couples our everyday taken-for-granted assumptions about the world to an ideology of dead matter, human utility and perpetual growth. The fundamental challenge of the Anthropocene is to restore a commitment to the vitality of life in all its forms on this planet as the basis of our institutions and professions. **This is the cultural renaissance the Anthropocene calls forth.**

For decades our principal response to this looming existential threat of our own making has been a grab bag of policies, processes, practices and products bearing the label ‘sustainable’. But ‘sustainability’ as both a concept and a practice generally falls short of the mark. As Christopher Wright, co-author of *Climate Change, Capitalism, and Corporations: Processes of Creative Self-Destruction*, suggests, many of the policies and practices of sustainability are really about being **less un-sustainable**. As such they fail the test of proportionality — valuable but inadequate in the context of the challenges of cultural renewal and systemic redesign we face. The true worth of many sustainability initiatives lies not so much in their intended outcomes as in the opportunities they open up for essential professional and social co-learning, particularly when embedded in value networks which have the potential to become learning networks.

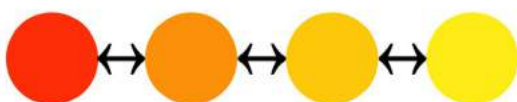
Even as the magnitude of the Anthropocene challenge becomes clearer, in our everyday professional and social lives **we continue to reproduce the status quo**. Business as usual is very much the order of the day — perhaps with some “sustainable” trimmings at the margins.

A Collaborative Inquiry

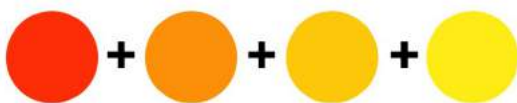
The Anthropocene Transition Project is based on the understanding that business as usual is no longer a viable option. It aims to inspire and inform new trans-disciplinary thinking and experimentation in the redesign of our professional and social practices.



Trans-Disciplinary - Higher Level Synthesis



Inter-Disciplinary - Interactive



Multi-Disciplinary - Additive

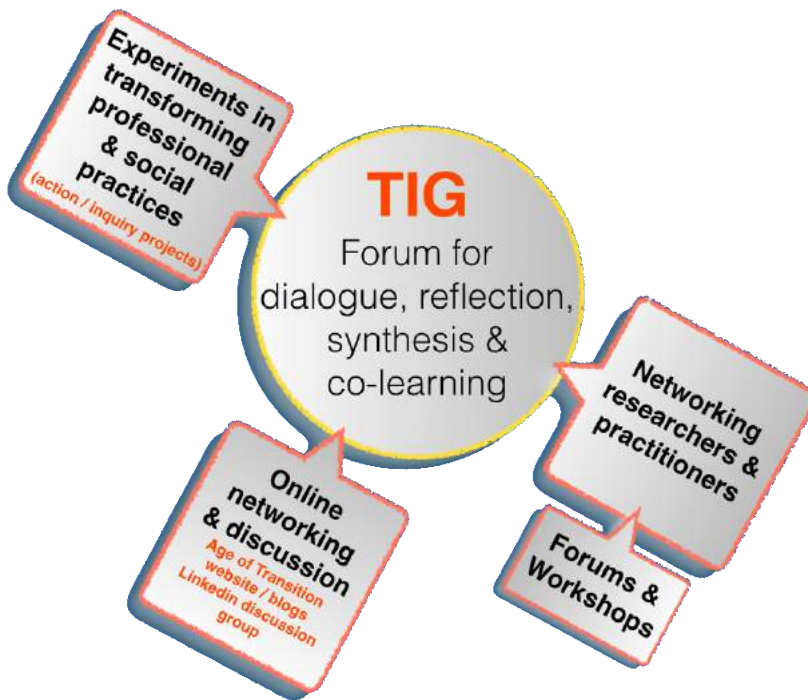


Disciplinary - Silos

Trans-disciplinarity in this context implies the emergence of **new knowledge syntheses** drawing on the cultural resources of diverse disciplines and traditions, including the traditional knowledges of indigenous peoples. It needs to be distinguished from multi-disciplinary approaches that employ the lenses of different disciplines to examine a problem, and interdisciplinary methods that promote a dialogue between disciplines. In simple terms multi-disciplinary denotes **additive**, inter-disciplinary **interactive**, and trans-disciplinary **holistic**.

The core of the project is a **Transdisciplinary Inquire Group** (TIG) that meets every 4-6 weeks. Here scholars and practitioners gather to report and reflect together on their experiences in a diversity of initiatives ranging from academic research to projects in organisations, workplaces and communities that aim to stretch the envelop of conventional thinking and practice.

As the Anthropocene Transition Project develops it will build a network of connections for the exchange of information and ideas and to encourage new partnerships and collaboration. This networking will utilise both face-to-face forums and workshops and online discussion.



The project is linked to the [Age of Transition website](http://www.ageoftransition.org) (www.ageoftransition.org) which includes a blog and a web digest updated twice weekly. There is also a [Preparing for the Anthropocene Transition](#) discussion group on the LinkedIn platform with over 1,000 members.

The four components of the Anthropocene Transition Project

More information

For more information on the Anthropocene Transition Project visit the website www.ageoftransition.org or contact:

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