

**Where there is No Vision the People Perish:
Ethical Vision and Community Sustainability***

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Abstract

This paper supports the inclusion of Christianity in the European constitution. It does this by analysing the role that an ethical vision plays in sustaining a community and the impact on other critical factors such as ethics, work, management, social structure and education that ensues when vision is undermined. It examines in particular the contribution that the Christian vision has made to communities in the past and the systemic role it can play in ensuring their long-term viability today. The study applies a multi-modal systems framework to analyse the links between the vision and these critical factors and projects that may unfold in communities once they lose their vision.

Keywords

Viability, community, Christian ethics, multi-modal systems thinking

Introduction

Considerable debate has been raised regarding the preamble to the proposed European Union constitution, which is supposed to contain uplifting words for Europeans, such as the following:

"Drawing inspiration from the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe, which, nourished first by the civilisations of Greece and Rome, characterised by spiritual impulse always present in its heritage and later by the philosophical currents of the Enlightenment, has embedded within the life of society its perception of the central role of the human person and his inviolable and inalienable rights, and of respect for law..."¹

Some people, the Pope being foremost among them, believe the exclusion of Christianity from the preamble dismisses history and the foundation on which European culture has been built². It ignores for example, that the heritage from the civilisations of Greece and Rome has been preserved in European culture through the agency of Christianity. It disregards the fact that the church was the only official Roman institution that survived the fall of the empire; that it preserved the Latin language and various aspects of Roman law, administration and culture. It does not recognise that the church was the sole social system that retained the pan-European structure after the empire was fragmented into the many medieval states. This structure is what the European Union is now trying to emulate 1600 years later. Furthermore, when the Greek classics were brought back to Europe, their ideas were first incorporated and

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¹ BBC News (2003c).

² The Scotsman (2003).

promoted by the universities that had been created and were part of the Church. The emergence of the Renaissance and its rediscovery of Greco-Roman classicism found some of its greatest advocates and workers among the clergy, such as Erasmus of Rotterdam and Fray Luis de León. The University of Alcalá, a church institution, was the most important centre where the old Castilian language was latinised³. Thus today, modern Castilian, the second most spoken European language in the world, is the closest to classical Latin. Likewise, the Enlightenment would not have taken place without some Christian intellectual and moral foundation that encouraged it to reject the abuses of the established Church. Many Enlightenment thinkers such as Pascal and Leibnitz professed Christian beliefs. Nor did the insurrection against the established Church emerge solely from outside its ranks. It also sprang from inside giving rise to the Free Church movement in several northern European countries including Methodism in the UK and pietism in Germany and Scandinavia. Can we justly exclude such a powerful cultural force from the European constitution?

Some have argued that identifying Christianity as the religious inheritance would exclude other religions. Thus according to the Commission's representative to the intergovernmental conference, Stefan de Rynck, "When you start to mention a particular belief or tradition, you exclude traditions you don't want to exclude"⁴. However, de Rynck's argumentation is inconsistent and prejudiced. The civilisations of Rome and Greece and the Enlightenment are included in the preamble while cultures such as the Germanic, Scandinavian, Celtic and Anglo-Saxon, are left out. Naturally, de Rynck does not condemn this exclusion, for if one were to include every culture that has played a role in European history, the list would be too long. One is forced to limit the list to those cultures that have played the greatest role. However, when the issue is the inclusion of Christianity, de Rynck applies a different criterion. That is, to make sure that none — regardless of how insignificant their contribution — should feel excluded, everyone must be excluded regardless of the greatness of their part. Two thousand years of history should make no difference.

Notwithstanding the absurdity of de Rynck's rationalisation, in this paper we add a different argument for including Christianity in the constitution. In our research we have found that the Christian vision has a number of systemic properties – its sacrificial ethics being foremost – that have enabled it to sustain European communities over many centuries. Conversely, the abandonment of this vision has been largely responsible for communities becoming increasingly non-viable. Our argument is divided into three parts. Firstly, we describe the systemic properties of the Christian vision that allow it to contribute to viability. Secondly, we incorporate it into a multi-modal systems framework. Thirdly, we apply this framework to a community in southeast Austria to illustrate how the erosion of the vision has made this community unsustainable in the long-term. Naturally, this debate has wider implications, especially given the emergent globalisation and multi-culturalism, but space has limited our discussion to the Christian faith and European culture. It should provide, however, a prelude to deliberation beyond these boundaries at a later stage.

An Ethical Vision

During the last two years, we have been engaged in a broad research project conducted in six different regions of Europe investigating the unsustainable⁵ predicament of their communities. In the process of collecting information, our interviewees, especially those who

³ Lopez Garcia and Garcia Lopez (1994).

⁴ BBC News (2003d).

⁵ We use the term “sustainable” as a synonym of the system’s concept “viable”, implying therefore that a sustainable community is also self-sustainable.

are leaders, have repeatedly blamed lack of vision as one of the main factors standing in the way of their communities' long-term viability. This is consistent with studies performed by a wide circle of scholars. Some argue that rather than defining sustainability, governments should include it in a vision along with the goals and priorities of the community⁶. Others believe that vision should flow from religious beliefs as expressed in the Sermon of the Mount and the Greek classics⁷. Wray and Hauer⁸ argue that "...[k]nowing what is the right thing for a community can only come from a partnership of citizens, elected officials, and public employees working together on the community's vision...". Vision is also regarded as a starting point for leadership development⁹ and education in the community¹⁰.

We propose that there are four main systemic requisites that a vision must fulfil to provide a solid foundation for a viable community. Firstly, the vision must conceive viability as comprising both culture and nature bound to each other. Ortega y Gasset warns us that if we allow nature and culture to drift apart, our thought will turn subjective and escape nature or it will embrace positivism and ignore culture. Such intellectual divergence has unfortunate consequences upon society:

We are governed by two counterbalancing imperatives. The cultural imperative commands that man, the living being, must be good. The vital imperative says that one must be human – a living being – and that therefore goodness must be compatible with life. Life must be cultured, but it must also have vitality. Life without culture is barbarism; culture without vitality is Byzantine decadence¹¹.

Secondly, a viable vision should not assume a perfect and harmonious world. On the contrary, it must confront a world of conflict, injustice and other evils. In our own particular application, it has to address communities that are facing unemployment, lack of participation in democratic institutions, social fragmentation, low birth rate, population decline and poor standards of education. Moreover, it should perceive that the root of this problem is mostly normative: people's selfishness, lack of solidarity, apathy and materialism. Thirdly, since many people in a community will not assume their responsibilities and contribute towards its viability, others will have to compensate for this by taking on extra obligations without expecting anything in return. Therefore, a vision must incorporate a sacrificial ethic. Fourthly, it is not sufficient for a vision to be believed, it must also be practised. Praxis is what turns belief into vision.

To what extent does the Christian faith¹² satisfy these requirements? According to the teachings of Christ and the Old Testament, to which he subscribed, God has created the world through his Spirit¹³, the third person of the trinity. In contrast with the mechanical theories of the world's origin held by both ancient and modern worldviews, this understanding stresses the personal involvement of the creator Spirit. Personal implies three main things: intellect, craftsmanship and sustenance. The creation of the world is not a magic act of waving some magic wand, but the product of a careful intellectual activity involving wisdom, understanding and prudence all poured into a magnificent design. This design is then implemented through

⁶ Geis and Kutzmark, 1995.

⁷ Buttimer, 1990.

⁸ Wray and Hauer, 1997.

⁹ Sorensen and Epps, 1996.

¹⁰ Nixon et al, 1999 and Edwards and Brown, 1996.

¹¹ Ortega y Gasset, 1995, p. 91f. Authors' translation from Spanish; Ortega's concept of *vital* and *vitality* roughly corresponds to our *nature*.

¹² Naturally, there are many interpretations of the Christian faith and we have had to make a choice. However, the interpretation used in this paper represents general beliefs held by most of the Christian traditions and is based on concepts drawn from the Bible.

¹³ Genesis 1:1; Psalm 104:30.

craftsmanship, metaphorically expressed by God using his hands, marking circles, measuring and drawing out boundaries while building the universe¹⁴. Finally, the universe is not self-sustainable but depends on the constant and personal care of the Spirit.¹⁵

The universe has two realms, nature and culture. Although they are distinct and only man operates in the cultural realm, they are nevertheless closely linked¹⁶. Culture cannot exist independently from the natural realm and the natural realm is dependent on culture. Culture is the product of the inspiration of God's Spirit, bestowed on man through a covenant relationship that makes him God's servant, an assistant designer and steward¹⁷. It also bestows freedom on man; he does not need to be told by others what to do, but receives his direction direct from the Spirit¹⁸. Due to its being a product of inspiration, cultural life is also referred to as spiritual life. However, since the same Spirit designed, built, and now sustains the universe, both nature and cultures are spiritual. Therefore, Christ presents a notion of spiritual life that is tightly bound with the ordinary everyday activities of life. Spiritual gifts include such things as craftsmanship, wisdom, agricultural, zoological and managerial expertise and juridical insight¹⁹. They are all necessary to provide creativity to culture and sustenance to nature. Furthermore, this link between culture and nature bridged by God's Spirit adds a further benefit. It presents reality, both cultural and natural, as knowable not

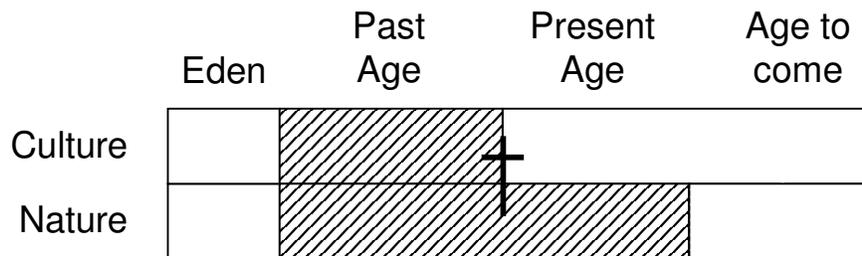


Figure 1: Ages in History

because of an inherent property in them – as the Greeks supposed – but as an intellectual gift of the Spirit to man²⁰. Yet, our ability to be realists, thanks to the Spirit's intervention, also makes us responsible for both our understanding and our actions.

Time plays a central role on Christ's teachings²¹. While not dismissing cause and effect, a far greater stress is made on events happening because their time has been fulfilled. Time has a circular rather linear motion. Just as in nature, events follow a cyclical pattern and take place according to day and night, the seasons and the phases of biological life²², culture also has this circularity so that "...there is nothing new under the sun."²³ Nevertheless, history is superimposed on time providing us with a deeper meaning and understanding of life. History centres on the drama of mankind; while it confers hope, it dismisses any shallow optimism of progress or future utopia for mankind and squarely focuses on the misery of life and ravages

¹⁴ Jeremiah 10:12; Proverbs 8: 27 - 30.

¹⁵ Isaiah 32:15.

¹⁶ Psalm 19.

¹⁷ Genesis 1:28-29.

¹⁸ Genesis 2:7.

¹⁹ Exodus 31:3-6; 1 Kings 3:9-12; 4:29-34.

²⁰ Isaiah 11:2.

²¹ Mark 1:15; Mark 13:26; Luke 5:35.

²² Ecclesiastes 3:1.

²³ Ecclesiastes 1:9.

of evil²⁴. Moreover, due to the close link between culture and nature, these conditions also affect nature, as it were by proxy²⁵.

Four historical ages may be discerned: Eden, the past age, our age and the age to come. During Eden, culture and nature are created unspoiled, but this ends abruptly with the fall of man. Ultimately, man's undoing is his ambition to become independent in thought and deed from God²⁶. In fact, he aspires to become like God; but his mistake is to forget that he is a designed and sustained creature and that by design he is incapable of redesigning himself. Man's expulsion from Eden, his separation from God's Spirit and the entrance of evil and death into the world begin the past age. Without inspiration, man loses his freedom; now he cannot be free without becoming a barbarian. He must be told by others what to do, he must be constrained. When he is fortunate enough, "others" are prophets, but most of the time he is told what to do by tyrants and exploiters²⁷. Learning and understanding is only available to a few; the ordinary man lives in ignorance and oppression. Slavery becomes the symbol of life. Nature is also dragged down, since it is dependent on a cultured mankind for its sustenance. It is an age marked by oppression.

Given the tragic predicament of man and the world, man's redemption and the restoration of life become the chief theme of history. The Greek philosophers' chief preoccupations are existence and perfection; the prophets' concern is life and emancipation. Thus, the liberation of slaves from Egypt is the first major redemptive event in history. While the Spirit of God is not restored to all Israelites and therefore the ability for everyone to receive direct instruction from God, they are given the law instead, which embodies justice. The Exodus and the law not only characterise the past age, but also foreshadow the crucifixion and the restoration of God's Spirit and life which marks the beginning of the present age and are the centre point of history. Both justice and love play an essential role in this. Justice means that God does not turn a blind eye on the crimes of man; love means that he attains this justice by serving the sentence himself through the death of Christ. By it, man not only receives acquittal, but also his and the world's emancipation²⁸.

Emancipation and the removal of evil from the world are delivered in two instalments. This is illustrated in Figure 1 where the presence of evil is symbolised by the shaded areas and its absence by the white areas. The first instalment belongs to the present age and brings cultural emancipation. God's Spirit is offered to man together with freedom. This allows us to live life to the full, the way God would want us to live. Moreover, this starts today; culturally the present age and the age to come have been merged into one. This is what Christ meant when he said, "...the kingdom of God is within you."²⁹ Culturally, emancipation is a concrete reality that has been experienced by Christ's followers – comprising a vast variety of people – for two thousand years. Despite the difficulty of describing this cultural emancipation – for it is itself varied – for many it is quite an ordinary thing, such as the adjustment of our sight to darkness. Where once nothing could be seen, now silhouettes can be discerned gradually allowing us to make sense of what was previously concealed. We do not see with perfect clarity, for nature has not yet been restored, but we can see in part. Here again, this seeing and understanding, even if it is in part, bestows a corresponding responsibility upon us. We are to turn our newly gained sight to this world and fight against the mess that plagues it. Inspired by an ethic of sacrificial love, we are to serve others even when they cannot repay us: food for the

²⁴ Genesis 6:5-6.

²⁵ Romans 8:20.

²⁶ Genesis 3:4.

²⁷ Deuteronomy 15:15; Isaiah 10:1-2.

²⁸ Isaiah 61:1-4; Luke 4:18-19.

²⁹ Luke 17:21; Colossians 2:7-17, 1 Timothy 6:19.

hungry, shelter for the homeless, liberation to the oppressed³⁰. We will thus hasten the arrival of the age to come – the second instalment – when nature will be recreated and evil finally and completely eradicated. Thus, from the beginning to end, the redemption of this world is gained through sacrificial ethics which, in contrast to mysticism or contemplative religion, is real and concrete like Christ's suffering: real timber, real nails, real sweat and real blood.

Multi-Modal Systems Thinking

Our next step is to incorporate this vision into a systems framework – multi-modal systems thinking (de Raadt, 1998) – in order to make an empirical application. This framework pays special attention to the interrelationships between the diverse systems in the world, both natural and cultural, as well as the links between their various aspects or modalities within

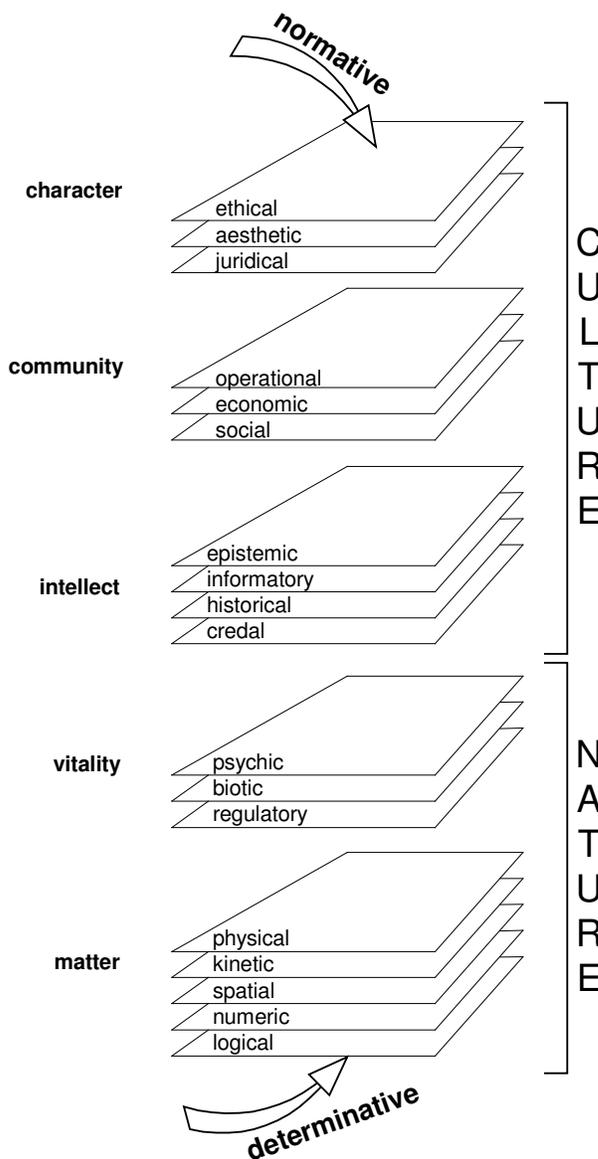


Figure 2: Multi-Modal Systems Framework

which these systems function. Briefly, the approach identifies four domains in culture; each domain is comprised by a number of modalities, represented by the parallelograms in Figure 2. The character domain has three modalities: ethical, aesthetic and juridical; the community domain also has three modalities: operational, economic and social. The intellect domain has four modalities: epistemic, informatory, historical and credal. Likewise, nature has two domains, vitality and matter, each with its own modalities. The vitality domain has three modalities, psychic, biotic and regulatory and the matter domain has five: physical, kinetic, spatial, numeric and logical.

The sequential order of these domains and their modalities and the links between them is brought about by the two arrows symbolising the creative and sustaining power of God's Spirit flowing in two directions. The first arrow is determinative; it represents things – like the weather – that are out of human control. It runs upwards and determines or sets each foundation of each domain or modality above it, just as a foundation is set before a house is built on top of it. The

³⁰ Isaiah 1: 17; Mathew 25:31-46.

second arrow, running downwards, is normative; it addresses our responsibility as humans and inspires how things ought to be. Here again, this arrow links all the modalities. Each modality or domain provides an inspiration or objective to the modalities or domains below it, just as one must first be inspired by the idea of building a house before building its foundation. Within this framework, a community and its natural environment are regarded as viable if two conditions are fulfilled. Firstly, life extends itself over all the modalities. Secondly, creative development takes place within each of the cultural modalities. That is, life is lived to the full and with ongoing cultural creativity – in contrast to mere technological and economic progress – in the community.

Of special interest are the credal and psychic modalities that simultaneously provide a boundary as well as a link between the cultural and natural realms. On the one hand, they set a boundary that differentiates man from animal; on the other, they provide the link that makes man an integral part of the natural realm. Thus, a dog inevitably behaves the way it feels. Sometimes man behaves the way he feels, but most of the time he will behave in the way he believes he ought to behave.

Application to a Non-Viable Community

In our study of communities in Europe, our aim has been to identify the critical factors that threaten their long-term viability and to design possible responses to these threats. One of these communities is located in Mürztal, a valley along the river Mürz, in Styria, southeast Austria. Our findings in Mürztal are similar to those in the other five communities we have surveyed. However, we prefer to deal here solely with Mürztal in order to preserve the integrity and peculiarities of our observations in this particular community.

Mürztal is a region that seems to have everything in its favour. Geographically, it is placed in a most advantageous position in the midst of transport routes that connect Vienna and other major Eastern European cities with Milan and the industrial centres of Italy. In addition to its industrially strategic position, Mürztal is well endowed with natural beauty provided by rivers and quaint villages surrounded by the backdrop of the Alps. It has a long cultural tradition, offers the complete range of educational institutions, including universities and technical colleges and all types of recreation in its beautiful mountains. It is rich. It has the highest ownership of Mercedes Benz cars in Austria and, we were told, “old people have too much money” and “banks have problems lending it”. It is near Graz, the capital of Styria and the 2003 Cultural Capital of Europe. Yet despite this cultural and natural endowment, it is a non-viable society, mostly due to loss of people (the population loss is one percent per year) through immigration and a low birth rate. Its population is rapidly ageing, and in spite of its present wealth, the region faces a barren future.

In our research in other European regions, we have found a number of common critical factors threatening the viability of diverse regions. Moreover, other studies³¹ have also identified similar factors among communities in diverse regions of the world that are essential for their viability and which at the same time represent trouble spots that threaten them. It does not make much of a difference whether the community is a tribal village in Africa, a suburb of Berlin or a rural town in Sweden. Due to their strong normative quality, these factors depend more on the common humanity of their citizens than on the diversity of their economic and technological development or geographical location. In Mürztal, we identified seven of these factors – ethics, work, management, social structure, education, vision and fear.

³¹ Ahlmark, 1998; Buttimer, 1998, 1990; Dodds, 1997; de Raadt, 2002; Edwards and Brown, 1996; Nixon et al, 1999; Ryn, 19981, 1990; Råberg, 1997; Schutte, 2000; Smailes, 1995; Sorensen and Epps, 1996; Taylor et al, 1997.

Each of these factors operates in a different modality. Furthermore, each is linked to others in a normative and, to a lesser extent, in a determinative manner. Even a relatively small number of factors generate a very large number of potential links, running in both normative and determinative directions. For example, seven factors can generate up to twenty-one links. Naturally, the higher the number of links, the more complex their analysis becomes. Therefore, in addition to selecting the relevant factors, we have selected a subset of links small enough to allow for analysis and at the same time large enough to represent the most important threats to viability. Figure 3 shows the factors – represented by the black circles – operating in different modalities and interacting with each other through twelve links – represented by arrows.

In addition to a variety of empirical data, extracted from relevant administrative and descriptive documents and published statistics, we also conducted in depth non-structured interviews with leaders who actively participate in the everyday life of the community. This included several managers dealing with family business and training programmes for youth, the unemployed and disabled people. Also interviewed were two consultants working with a variety of municipal projects, a union leader, a university student, a director of a government educational authority and a mayor of a village. These data were stored on a database using SmCube, a special software package developed for this method³². This database stores both theoretical knowledge and empirical data. The data was then analysed to build a model of the factors in the community. The model consists of two parts; the first part describes each of the factors, as they are experienced in the community. The second identifies the links that exist between one factor and the other and how the totality of these links will unfold in the future and affect the community's viability.

Critical Factors

Below is a summary of what we were told about the seven factors selected:

Ethics

Traditional ethics in Mürztal, inherited from Christianity, have been replaced by a utilitarian preoccupation with self-interest. This has meant that individualism and competitive behaviour have overrun the old spirit of unity in the community. It has also led to materialism, where “each one wants his own ideas and his own money and his own car”³³. People regard less fortunate people as “others”. This has hit the family hardest, the institution that is supposed to embody a caring attitude. Parents have neglected duties towards their children by putting “me” in first place, and consider work for its monetary benefits rather than for the family. We were told that many fathers and mothers provide only a “short-term parenthood” and “while parents are at work children are alone at home watching television.” Parents do not blame themselves for this, but blame the lack of low-price, well-organised child minding facilities available to them. Neglected children mimic their parent’s selfishness and “lack respect for them”, and in the most extreme cases reproduce the aggression and violence they learn from the television in their own behaviour.

Work

Work in the region has been affected by two major changes. One is the disappearance of large state-owned industries, mostly associated with steel mining and processing; and the other is the migration of industry to other countries that offer lower costs of labour and

³² de Raadt, J. D. R., 2001.

³³ In this and the next section, text in quotes are statements by our interviewees.

infrastructure. We were told that “when a company moves out of the region it is difficult to replace it”. These changes have hit older people and women the hardest: “if you lose your employment and you are old (more than 50 years) it is difficult to get a job again”. Of the 350 women recently retrenched by a company, it is expected that only 50% of them will get a job compared with 75% in the past. Until recently, much hope had been put in high technology industry but the industry has turned out to be very unstable and generated highly inflated expectations, especially among the young. Many university students chose information technology studies at university expecting to gain high salaries and wide choices in employment. The burst of the information technology bubble has left them both unemployed and with an education that is inadequate for other types of work. This is especially true in Styria where the opportunities for highly technologically trained people are mostly limited to Graz. In addition, the closure of industry has left the region with a large number of unemployed people who do not have mobility due to low skills.

Old ideas about work and employment – linked to large industry and government – have hindered the opening of new possibilities for people. For example, there is a lack of development of small and medium size enterprises and the great opportunities the region offers for tourism have not been utilised. Likewise, we were told that with the closure of traditional industry, the region has been left lacking identity, vision and leadership. Although university studies in the humanities and the social sciences are highly popular with young people, they do not necessarily lead to employment. This is exacerbated by the view of young people that the purpose of work is “to earn a lot of money”.

Management

In common with other places, the region has suffered from the emergence of “managerialism”³⁴, which has been pressed upon Mürztal through the main centres in Vienna, Linz and Brussels. Their control of society and the economy is driven by political motives and by the idea that problems of economy and society can be solved entirely through the application of an impersonal and quantitative oriented management. It can be detected at every level of administration from prime ministers to mayors of municipalities. The role of mayors in villages, for example, has shifted from leadership to management. We were told that “it was the tradition that the mayor was the father of the community but now he is the head of the council”. Since vision, ideas and getting people to work together are the province of leadership, its demise and replacement by management has left the region fragmented and without vision or ideas. “The old managers [who also were leaders] went into the factory and made people feel that they [the managers] were aware of their contribution”.

Managerialism is also characterised by generating a virtual reality where organisational rituals claim to represent concrete results. Interviewees pointed out that “many organisations are engaged in planning but not necessarily in implementation” and “there are a lot of studies but no action”. This leads to people feeling that their communities have no direction. They believe that they are being “manipulated by MBA’s” who manage from overseas and “by their knowledge obtained at business schools” but who are out of touch with the people and their circumstances. The split between management and leadership affects especially small to medium size enterprises, for “in a small company the manager must also be a leader”. Given that the future of the region will depend heavily on the development of small companies, the emergence of managerialism weakens considerably the ability of the region to respond to its economic difficulties.

³⁴ Protherpough and Pick, 2002.

Social Structure

People lamented the loss of the old community spirit and its replacement by an uncaring attitude, individualism, an emphasis on self-pursuit, leisure and youth culture. Furthermore, competitive behaviour and greater individualism have fragmented people and “politicians have made mileage of this by dividing one group against the other”. There is also fragmentation between one community and the other; towns will not collaborate and, “if there’s an event in one town the people in the other towns will not attend”. This is exacerbated by the lack of volunteerism in Austria, “whose values are still derived from imperial times and are focused on the bureaucracy”.

However, the rapid ageing of the population, instigated by the low birth rate, is of greatest concern, especially due to it being spread all over Europe. A drop in the birth rate has cut down the population numbers of young people, that is, it has truncated the future of the region. This is made worse by the fact that young people are being born to families who offer them short-term parenthood and who put material prosperity before them. They are therefore more susceptible to the problems of alcohol, drugs and social handicaps. Furthermore, in Mürztal, a large number of its well-qualified youth – the future leadership so badly needed in the region – are moving into the larger cities. In this they are encouraged by the older generation who say to them, “go to Vienna, go to Graz, don’t stay here”. This leaves behind those who lack mobility because they are unskilled and the long-term unemployed. To make things worse, immigrants “are not welcome” even if they come from neighbouring Eastern Europe, therefore denying an inflow of talent into the region.

Education

Although the Austrian educational system is committed to the lofty ideals of “truth, beauty and goodness” and has shown greater capacity to adopt these than other countries – such as in Germany and Switzerland – it shares their common weaknesses. A serious problem has been the subordination of education to a politically instigated “managerialism” that aims to control the educational system through the development of centralised policies and a standardised approach. An interviewee said, “we have a very centralised system; our schools and universities are ten years behind other developments in Austria”.

In addition, efforts have been made to bring education and scientific research closer to the needs of industry. Several studies³⁵, including the long history of education in Europe, attest that the development of culture, intellect and science thrive on variety rather than standardisation and that variety cannot be dictated through centralised policies. On the contrary, any attempt to centrally control intellect, culture and science stifles them. It acts as a discouragement to creative and intellectual people who, by nature, are inclined to be independent and different. Furthermore, subjugating science and education to the dictates of industry and government, eliminates any possibility of a critical and independent evaluation of their decision and policy making. Such critical and independent evaluation is especially important given the managerial blunders and dishonest practices that have recently plagued industry and government. However, despite the vast influence governments and industry have had over education, education has failed to help either industry or the community and “the gap between society, especially work, and education has become wider and wider”. Education was also described to us as lacking “life relatedness”. We were told that, “if the issue of life relatedness were taught to the young, they would respond positively”. Educational institutions have failed to relate technology to society and even “information technology and information have not been brought together”.

³⁵ Graham, 2002; Maskell and Robinson 2002; Pelikan, 1992.

Developments at the tertiary level have not been successful either. Universities have taken refuge behind their traditional research image and the alternative Fachhochschule³⁶ system, where the “greater priority is given to developing students, has not been very successful”. Success has nevertheless been reached at the vocational level, which has become a fast growing area of education. Yet, while vocational education and apprenticeships are important, they cannot fill the gap of leadership and highly educated people that Mürztal needs to get out of its predicament.

Vision

Religion is taught at school and many students choose to study it of their own free will, but Catholicism has stopped being a strong influence in Austria. Despite the fact that 86% of Austrians regard themselves as Catholics and pay their contribution to the church, only 10% are active. This split between faith and everyday life seems to run parallel to the split between education and life-relatedness. This has especially left young people without defence against the advances of materialism and intellectual and cultural decline promoted by the media. More than seventy years ago, Ortega y Gasset³⁷ warned us that the loss of moral influence by the church and the university would place the media as the main shaper of society’s values. This has been fulfilled and “ethics and morals are now learnt from the television and the media.”

Fear

Adversities in life, such as economic uncertainty, unemployment and social decline such as is at present being experienced in Mürztal, drives people to fear. Fear often turns into aggression. We were told that aggression and violence among the young have increased. Likewise there is “a suspicious attitude towards outsiders in the region” and a negative attitude especially towards “Rumanians, Czechs, Bulgarians and Russians”. Due to the fear of losing their jobs people show more “competitive behaviour”, less “solidarity and teamwork” and a striving to “advance themselves”.

Fear may also turn into lethargy. Some people consider themselves “too old to learn something new”. Teachers are “not motivated” and “push the problems of the family and social adaptation out of the school”. “People procrastinate when starting small businesses” or reject new opportunities for change offered by tourism with statements such as “we want tourism but not in our mountains” or “we need no new vision”. “Disabled people are fearful of learning. They say – I could not handle it in the past, why should I be able to handle it now?” Finally, “people who study at university don’t like to take risks and start their own businesses” and prefer the safety of jobs in government or large business. These emotions are of course normal, but when vision is eroded, these feelings tend to take control of people’s lives with highly detrimental effects.

Links between Factors

The above factors represent the substance of what was described to us in Mürztal at the time of our survey. Some may dismiss it as an overly pessimistic picture constituting problems that have always been present in any community. This denial may partly be motivated by a static paradigm that dominates people's thinking about life while ignoring the dynamic nature of history. However, our next step, in which we examine how these factors are linked together, will expose the rashness of such a dismissal. For even if the negative intensity

³⁶ A tertiary educational system equivalent to the institute or university of technology in the English speaking countries.

³⁷ Ortega y Gasset, 1992.

of the factors were to be exaggerated by our interviewees, the links between these factors – represented by the arrows in Figure 3 – assure us that such intensity will undoubtedly be reached in the future. It is just a matter of time for the twelve selected arrows described below to bring this about:

vision => fear

Faith should instil trust and hope in people. When beliefs and vision are forfeited, as has happened in Mürztal, people become reliant on their feelings rather than their convictions. In times of adversity, these feelings often turn into fear. Fear is a strong force on people. Thus, the fear of losing the comforts of life is stronger than the desire to increase those comforts.

social structure <= fear

Since there is no longer an understanding of suffering in life and a hope to compel people to cope with hardship, fear overtakes them. The fear of economic hardship, of immigrants and their foreign cultures and of emotional and physical suffering, leads people to set up protective barriers around themselves. The community becomes thus divided, not only is there a rise in individualism, but even villages become suspicious of each other. Newcomers are suspected, or even despised, and kept at a distance. Families become fragmented and uncaring. The fear of economic adversity drives parents to place their greatest effort on their jobs and neglect the needs of children, youth and elderly in their families. Even disabled people are looked upon

with suspicion, for they do not fit the success image that is today promoted as essential in society. People associate suffering with failure and therefore fear suffering and sufferers alike.

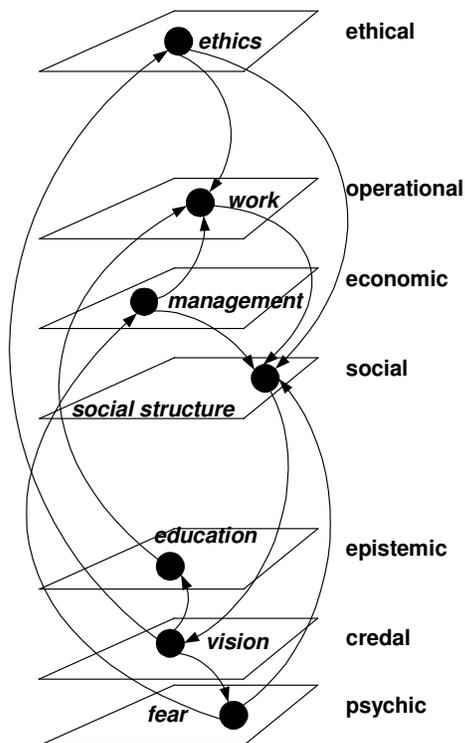


Figure 3: Factors and Black Arrows

management <= fear

The fear of suffering is well embodied in the utilitarian principle³⁸ that governs management and our western economies. This principle states that managers are driven as much by allure of profit as by fear of loss. However, when adversity strikes, fear tends to be a stronger force than allure. Managers' dread of a loss in the balance sheet becomes stronger than the appeal of a profitable one.³⁹ This fear often inhibits management taking the right decision or starting a worthwhile venture in terms of their benefits to the community due to the risk of forfeiting monetary gains. This is happening as much in private corporations as in public institutions, such as universities, symphony orchestras and hospitals, which traditionally were meant to seek the public good rather than the increase of material wealth⁴⁰.

³⁸ Bentham, 1948; Stuart Mill, 1969.

³⁹ de Raadt, 1997.

⁴⁰ Protherough and Pick, 2002.

ethics <= vision

The relationship between the ethical and credal modalities resembles the support provided to the light bulb by the base of a standing lamp. While the light bulb is held up by the base, it illuminates everything under it, even its base; but if the base is removed, the light bulb falls and darkness follows. Likewise, the ethical modality illuminates every modality under it, but if ethics is no longer part of our creed or vision, it collapses and people become driven by self-interest. Self-interest takes first place while self-denial and sacrifice for one's neighbour is laid aside.

ethics =>work

The light of ethics also illuminates the operational modality by displaying the needs of people and thus creating opportunities for work to fulfil these needs. However without this light, work is driven purely by a labour market where people seek work "for better pay and fewer hours" with no regard for the service they provide to the community. The market has no intellectual power to evaluate the needs of humanity, the strength of the region, civility and culture and the long-term viability of the community. For example, at present the market regards work which produces highly technological gadgetry (that is often not needed) as deserving far higher payment than the parental work to bring up and educate children or caring for the elderly by family members.

ethics => social structure

Ethics should be the glue of society that holds people together. Nowhere is this truer than in the family. Without ethical love, as against purely emotional love – operating in the psychic modality – the family fragments and crumbles. We already have made mention of the critical state of the family and the declining birth rate. If the bricks crumble, so does the house that is built with them; fragmentation of the family is tearing apart the community through competitive behaviour and individualism which replace solidarity and collaboration. Thus, on top of a society with few – and largely neglected – youths, we have added the bane of its being divided against itself. All this unfolds without people being quite aware of it. They may not yet experience the full impact of a senile society, but people should be alarmed at the harsh prospects of life in a couple of decades if this trend is not arrested. The recent death of many elderly people in France due to a heat wave has been blamed on the government and hospitals. Not much mention has been made of the families, friends and care providers who abandoned the elderly in the hot cities while they took vacations on the cooler coast⁴¹. This may be the future old age that awaits today's youth.

work <= management

Contemporary management regards the worker as a human resource necessary to process its products; as such, it signifies a cost in the utilitarian equation that must be minimised. Therefore, the aim of industry is to decrease employment and, as corollary, increase unemployment rather than reduce it. As the number of employees has sharply declined, a large proportion of the working population has been left without spirit of enterprise, vision or initiative. An interviewee said, "we do not have an identity and if we ask where we are going there is no answer". This managerial approach adds to the lack of ethics. It generates a myopic work force unable to transcend the boundaries of employment, discern the needs of the community and grasp at the opportunity for work.

⁴¹ BBC News (2002a)

work => social structure

The impact of industrial work and employment has taken place in two phases. The first one incorporated mass employment and the organisation of large numbers of workers in an industrial society that destroyed the important human fabric of family, friends, village and church. With the erosion of these, the social skills necessary to interact in a civic manner were lost. The second phase, marked by the rapid introduction of technology, reversed the trend of mass employment to mass unemployment. Unemployment has hit women and older people the hardest and the social structures that industry destroyed are no longer there to support them. This is exacerbated by the immigration of talented young people to the larger cities, further undermining Mürztal's community by robbing it of its future leadership.

management => social structure

In the absence of ethics and beliefs, government and industry is given a free hand to control every aspect of the community's life. It has made people dependent on government and industry to dictate to them: where they ought to live, what they should consume, what they should study and even how they should run their families. Finally, this management is practised from a distance. Thus ordinary people have imposed on them policies and objectives that are concocted in places far removed from the realities where their lives unfold.

work <= education

Attempts by the government and universities, including the Fachhochschule, to bridge work and education and thus diminish unemployment has failed. The reason for this is that the educational agenda has been tethered to a failing industrial system. We seem constantly to ignore the gross mismanagement and incompetence that is progressively destroying companies that have operated for more than 100 years. We naively accept the bland excuses that executives give to the press every time they report failures in their companies and justify the retrenching of thousands of workers as a necessary corrective step for their own incompetence. Why should universities, colleges and schools shape their curriculum to match this managerial incompetence? A large proportion of our youth was lured into studying courses in information technology and promised future bliss. In Mürztal it meant that the type of technology that students learnt "is not of much use to small industry in the region because they cannot afford it". The poor intellectual quality of these technological programmes has meant that students have wasted their time learning obsolete software and hardware. Instead they should have learnt how to seek a vision in life, how to think, and create the opportunities for realising that vision. Now they sit unemployed, uneducated and betrayed by the system they trusted.

social structure => vision

Vision should be inspired and focused on the life of the community. This life includes social interaction between family, friendship and common interests, the work of service to the community and the wise management of the resources available to sustain this work. When social structures are destroyed, the concrete objectives of the vision are also removed and people fall into escapist beliefs. This may be expressed in a "Sunday only" Christianity or in an assortment of experimental spirituality that people seek in Eastern religions, tarot cards and Satanism. The focus of all these is personal self-gratification rather than service to our neighbour. Such beliefs are encouraged by the media, commercialism and academics⁴².

⁴² BBC News, 2003b.

education <= vision

Formally, the educational system seems to embrace high ideals. It stands for truth, goodness and beauty. It provides ample religious education (quite popular among young people). It stresses important values such as family, civic and social duties and even the integration of the disabled. Why has all this failed? Although these worthy things are included in the educational programme, they are not integrated into it. Students are seldom taught how compassion, family, love, civility and “truth, goodness and beauty” relate to technology, work, science, different branches of industry, and even to their family and community lives. This represents a deep intellectual crisis in the west, which we will have to address if we are to live intelligent and cultured lives.

Projection of the Future

This set of twelve arrows provides a model of the dynamic change that is taking place in Mürztal and, by projecting the links forward into time, they picture what may happen in the future. We can especially appreciate in Figure 3 the critical role that decline in vision has played in the community and will play if things remain unchanged. Looking upwards, it has allowed fear to take over control of management and social structure and at the same time undermined ethics. Looking downwards, we note that a weakened ethic no longer exercises a caring inspiration in either work or the social structures of the community. They are now defenceless and can be preyed upon by fear, either directly or through managerial intervention. Since an attack on work, management and social structure strikes each of the modalities that comprise the community, we may now understand why the community as a whole is gradually disintegrating. Furthermore, the model indicates that the arrows form several loops that accelerate this disintegration. Some examples of these loops are:

vision => fear => management =>social structure => vision

vision => ethics => social structure => vision

vision => education =>work =>social structure =>vision

The peculiarity of these loops is that they feed on themselves (the cybernetic term for them is "positive feedback"). That is, the detrimental effect of the black arrows on the factors becomes stronger with time. We refer to loops that are composed of black arrows as *black loops*, for they destabilise the community and make it non-viable in the long term. The future of Mürztal – and of many other similar communities – is at the mercy of these black loops.

Conclusions

Our research in Mürztal has confirmed the relevance of the criteria we established for a vision at the beginning of this paper. Firstly, the presence of fear due to lack of vision illustrates the link between nature and culture. Fear belongs to man's nature — psychic modality — while vision pertains to the credal modality in his culture. In Mürztal, the loss of faith has given in to fear and in turn fear has brought detrimental effects upon management and the community's social structure (see Figure 3). Secondly, even a community such as Mürztal, which is blessed with almost every conceivable advantage, presents a disharmonious world carrying its particular set of ills — selfishness, unemployment, mismanagement, social fragmentation and inadequate education. Thirdly, since this is not a perfect world and many will fail to pull their weight, a sustainable vision needs to encompass a sacrificial ethic to make up for this shortage. Fourthly, this ethic must be put into practice, not only in terms of

work, but also in terms of bringing people together into the social fabric of the community, as is shown in Figure 3.

Christ's vision not only addresses all of these criteria but, as we indicated earlier, it has proven its ability to sustain and renew society over a period of 2000 years. If de Rynk and others who hold similar views wish to suppress Christianity from the constitution and yet preserve their moral and intellectual integrity, they must disregard the churches that stand in every village and the cathedrals that adorn European cities. They must disregard Europe's universities, its science, Michelangelo, Rembrandt, Cervantes, Tolstoy and Dickens. They must disregard Bach, Beethoven, Bruckner and Sibelius and the symphony orchestras. They must disregard every Christian ideal of justice, love and compassion that has defended Europeans against tyrants in every institution. In fact, they must disregard almost everything that has made Europe European and admired and imitated by the peoples of other cultures. Furthermore, our research in Mürztal suggests that Europe will encounter an unsustainable future with a declining population and almost no children: a very sad picture indeed. If de Rynk's wants to avoid this, without the help of Christianity, he will have to turn for help from the unnamed and untested traditions he does not wish to exclude. In the short period of time that is left, they will have to attain sustainability and fill the vacuum left by 2000 years of excluded Christian vision.

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