

ZIG Project

Zagreb Innovation Ecosystem for Good Journalism

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Executive Summary

Quick draft by Dino Karabeg

Prelude

I am about to do something that is unheard of in executive summaries: I will begin by philosophizing about what constitutes a good (student, entrepreneurial, creative young - in spirit - people's) project in the 21st century. My reason for doing that is that once the over-all structure of this project is understood, the details will gradually fall into place, because they will have a place to fall into.

So imagine a young man, recently graduated, recently married, with a child on the way, who invested his money into a nice apartment and is about to invest more into remodeling it, eager to make a cosy place for his budding family. But then it turns out that a team of architects and geologists inspected the house and decided that it had serious structural problems, that its condition was rapidly deteriorating, that it was increasingly unsafe to live in and that it urgently needed repairs.

Naturally, our hero's first impulse is to ignore them. He is already overcommitted, and simply has no time and energy for another large problem. But when he's given it a thought, he realizes that just ignoring the problem would be sort of insane. If, on the other hand, the masons will be in the house, they can easily fix the electrical cables and the sewage, which he thought of doing but couldn't afford. And the government grant that is given for people in his situation can easily cover parts of his original investment. Gradually, a much wiser plan begins to take shape in his mind.

I am telling this story because the basic shape of the ZIG project will be similar in structure as this 'wiser plan.' A difference will be that the synergies, and the possibilities that are opening up, will be far more spectacular. The project is explained in terms of three levels, of which the first corresponds to our young man's apartment remodeling project.

Project Level One

Dissertations and Startups

On this level the students and entrepreneurs are doing what they would do anyway – research projects, dissertations and startups. The added value is synergy: The prospects of doing something meaningful or great are largely increased by doing their projects within the framework of the ZIG project.

The goal of this project is to instantiate 'an innovation ecosystem for good journalism,' which has already been drafted at the Knowledge Federation workshop in Barcelona last November. The basic machinery and the basic story line is already there, and for students and for entrepreneurs there is a lot to learn just by reading it aloud, and a lot more by working out the details. The economics / leadership students and entrepreneurs for ex. will benefit from being on the front line of the 'systemic innovation' development, where newly developed technology is enabling new organizational infrastructures, which then need new business and leadership models. The entrepreneurs will benefit from being in the front line of large systemic changes, resembling the 'once upon a time in Detroit' formula:

While an investment into oil drilling and gas stations would make little sense in a world where the only means of transportation is the horse, it made lots of sense in the world where Ford had just undertaken to mass-produce automobiles. Systemic innovation in any domain offers similar first-mover advantages to its participants.

Project Level Two

Systemic Innovation

On this level our project benefits from two fortunate coincidences.

The first is that our large systems tend to be inefficient, ineffective, or even flagrantly misconstructured. (I see an explanation of this as a missing piece in our puzzle and I am now writing it up carefully.) The American 'financial services industry' alias Wall Street is a familiar example; but other examples are similar, and academia and journalism should not be spared. So to fast-forward to conclusion, imagine us, contemporary people as nuts and bolts in shabby, falling apart

or even completely misconstructured machines; we are working hard, wearing ourselves out, and still the results are not great.

The second fortunate coincidence is that technology has just been developed which allows for radical reconstruction of large systems. I am of course talking about the Web and other information technology. Interestingly, this technology has hitherto been used for powering the old ways of working – i.e. it has simply been added to the old, dysfunctional or flagrantly misconstructured 'machinery.'

The time is now ripe for a new wave of innovation – **systemic innovation**. The market potential is enormous. Knowledge Federation has emerged as a forerunner at this exciting new frontier.

What will turn out to be a fortunate characteristic of the Good Journalism prototype we drafted in Barcelona is that it has the characteristics of a *new paradigm* – it is somewhat like the change from the horse cart to the train or the automobile: You might like horses, but when you've seen the two side by side, it's not difficult to guess that the horse-based transportation has no future.

By engaging in this specific instance of systemic innovation, the ZIG project will then also innovate on this other level; it will be the first student project in systemic innovation. The ZIG project is of course not restricted to journalism; rather, it is structured so that it can grow from its simple core and take up *any* systemic innovation tasks later on.

I sometimes talk about the 'guerrilla approach to academic research'; by this I don't mean anything improvised or less solid. Rather, I mean that most of academic research now has the flavor of 'stationary army' with the discipline of the military camp and all that goes with it. This is especially the case in large systems such as the United States. So it is an advantage, especially in a smaller environment, if one can work along a line that is new and original and recognizable internationally, and which will resonate internationally.

Systemic innovation is a natural way to develop information technology; it also offers large advantages to entrepreneurship (roughly comparable to marketing automobiles, as compared to marketing automobile parts to people who have never seen an automobile). And yet its most attractive side is that it offers

breakthrough possibilities along a recognizably urgent societal agenda, as we shall see next.

The Startup Weekend Zagreb will be part of ZIG project. The idea will be to instantly realize the possibilities for entrepreneurship that the ZIG project will open up; and vice versa – entrepreneurship will be a vehicle for bringing ideas into practice.

Project Level Three

Solution to Global Issues

I confess that I don't feel completely comfortable making big statements like "It is obvious what the solution to global issues will have to be like, and we are already working on it." However this is true, and it will have to be said in some way or another.

Perhaps this will flow better if we say that the nature of the solution was already clear to some people when they were starting The Club of Rome in 1968, for ex. to Erich Jantsch. That is the approach I have taken in my already mentioned writeup. Jantsch was the physicist and system theorist who in his introductory keynote on the first meeting of The Club in Rome in '68 said, in a nutshell, that the human systems lacked feedback (suitable informing or information flow) and therefore control (sustainability). I consider it a bit of a miracle that this very clear and simple insight is not sufficiently recognized even today – we are still trying to find 'solutions' to 'problems' such as the climate change – within the constraints of *existing* systems!

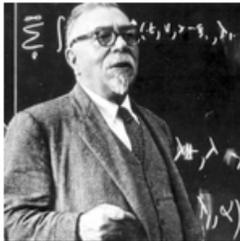
It will be obvious that the public informing prototype that the ZIG project will be implementing (according to this proposal), is developing exactly what, as Jantsch diagnosed, was lacking.

Interestingly, from the mentioned starting position in '68, in 1969 Jantsch was visiting the MIT for a semester, writing a report about the future of the university. Jantsch recommended that "the university should make structural changes within itself toward a new purpose of enhancing society's capability for continuous self-renewal." He foresaw that the central role will be played by 'system laboratories,' which will be focusing on creation of "joint systems" of society and technology.

What we will be doing in Zagreb is exactly the direction Jantsch foresaw as the one that will have to be 'the emerging role of the university.'

The header of my mentioned writeup presently looks like this:

Welcome to the Game-Changing Game
where systems thinking morphs into
SYSTEMS DOING - THE SOLUTION TO GLOBAL ISSUES



There is only one quality more important than "know-how"..... This is "know-what" by which we determine not only how to accomplish our purposes, but what our purposes are to be.

Norbert Wiener

(Quoted in Erich Jantsch: Integrative Planning for the "Joint Systems" of Society and Technology--The Emerging Role of the University)

Jantsch begins his 125-page report by quoting Wiener (the above quote is copied and pasted as it is in his text). You will notice that the 'know-what' is the key word. And most interestingly (as it will turn out) – he, and in principle The Club of Rome, got this 'know-what' part right from the start. It was the corresponding 'know-how' that they were struggling with.

The point is that The Club of Rome was appealing to people in power, such as political leaders and university deans. But the people in power derive their power from the systems in which they serve; (as the recent example of President Obama might illustrate) they do not have the power to change their systems.

I don't want to use more than six pages for this executive summary, so let me summarize this third part: We are about to do what The Club of Rome undertook to do, but in a completely different way – by empowering the young (in spirit) people to co-create the world they will want to live in.

The Club of Zagreb will be meeting the first time in Europe House Zagreb on May 24, 2012, and then again at IUC Dubrovnik during the week September 30 - October 6. And after that twice every year according to a similar schedule. In Dubrovnik we will offer an international course, whose role will be to internationalize the initiative, by passing it on to selected young talents from some of the world's best universities.

Each year The Club will take up a single systemic issue and set up a suitable educational - entrepreneurial - research project.

The meeting in Zagreb will be mostly the meeting of 'grownups' whose task will be to prepare the research project, the course, and the related entrepreneurial developments.

The ZIG project we are developing is a case in point - the ideas and write-ups we are developing will simply be copied into a larger development in Dubrovnik.

The over-all ZIG project will also be a radical innovation in education - where a global team of experts co-creates a course, which is then taken by students and other learners internationally. The learning will be active - the students will be co-creating systemic solutions together with us, and in that way acquiring not only skills, but also attitudes and work habits that are associated with positive global change.

Instead of Conclusion

Synergies

Lots of people I have been talking with liked the name 'The Game-Changing Game,' which I think quite accurately describes the nature of this undertaking.

The Game is constructed so that there is no risk or additional investment, on the contrary - everyone's pursuing normal life and career, and if anything, the participants in the ZIG project have greater chances and larger prospects of success.

In addition, everyone participates in a much larger 'game,' where all sorts of spectacular gains become accessible.

Among the synergies not already mentioned or alluded to above I would highlight the possibility of engaging a large sponsor or donor: If we are only doing student research projects and courses, this might be interesting, but not nearly as much as the prospects mentioned at the upper two levels of this proposal.

I am working on a longer story that explains the details. In the meantime, I will be glad to answer any questions in a dialog.