Becoming Context-Free: Toward a Research Programme in Sociology of Knowledge

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Becoming Context-Free:

Toward a Research Programme in Sociology of Knowledge

Romeo V. Turcan

Summary

In this *inaugural lecture* that I delivered on Sep 20, 2017 I discuss how we – as Business School, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities and University – can enhance our interdisciplinary research, teaching and knowledge transfer endeavour. This lecture builds on the current challenges in these three areas and inter alia discusses their impact on the AAU PBL model.

As the title suggests the lecture has to major components: Sociology of Knowledge and Becoming Context-Free. What the title does not explicitly state, but what glues these two together – and what happens to be my passion – is the notion of 'newness'.

Through my lecture I will argue that 'becoming context-free' in pursuit of 'newness' is essential in our efforts to enhance our inter-disciplinary research and teaching, innovate our PBL model, excel in knowledge transfer – all aimed at enriching social impact of our academic endeavour. Clearly this is not the only way, but it will definitely contribute to our holistic - interdisciplinary research, teaching and knowledge transfer - academic efforts.

Keywords

Research programme; Sociology of knowledge; Newness; Becoming context-free; Theory building; Useful knowledge; Useless knowledge

Becoming Context-Free:

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Words of Appreciation

Dear students, colleagues, your Excellency, family… it is really a privilege to stand hear and deliver this inaugural lecture. This year 10 years ago I embarked on the AAU journey… and here I am. As my father would say – and I do believe, proudly – looking down upon me at this moment from heaven: that is something… a boy from a little town up north in Moldova - that is Drochia - had achieved such success.

I dedicate this lecture to my family – and by family I mean not only my wife Natalia and my kids: Andreea and Andy, but also my parents, grandparents, and grand-grandparents… in the course of the lecture you will discover the connection. At the same time I am in debt to so many people – friends, colleagues – who over the years shaped my character and resolve. I am afraid even this hour or so would not be enough for me to thank them all for their encouragement and guidance; I just want to say big 'thank you all' from the bottom of my heart for your invaluable advice and leadership.

Lecture Outline

In this ***inaugural lecture*** I will discuss how we – as Business School, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities and University – can enhance our interdisciplinary research, teaching and knowledge transfer endeavour. This lecture builds on the current challenges in these three areas and inter alia discusses the impact on the AAU PBL model.

As the title suggests the lecture has to major components: Sociology of Knowledge and Becoming Context-Free. What the title does not explicitly state, but what glues these two together – and what happens to be my passion – is the notion of 'newness'.

I will first briefly define sociology of knowledge. Then, I will define 'newness' and 'becoming context-free' and drawing on my life experience, I will discuss the role 'newness' and 'becoming context-free' played in shaping my understanding of the world. As part of this discussion I will introduce a revised AAU PBL model and discuss implications for teaching and learning, for research and project funding. I will conclude by suggesting an interdisciplinary research program in sociology of knowledge.

Through my lecture I will argue that *'becoming context-free' in pursuit of 'newness' is essential in our efforts to enhance our inter-disciplinary research and teaching, innovate our PBL model, excel in knowledge transfer – all aimed at enriching social impact of our academic endeavour*. Clearly this is not *the* way, but it may contribute to our holistic academic efforts.

When preparing for the lecture I was trying to look for examples to illustrate 'newness' and 'becoming context-free'. In this process I found asking myself how come I had this passion for 'newness' and discovered that this passion was nurtured during my life, starting from my childhood. Hence, I will be using personal experience to exemplify 'newness' and 'becoming context-free'.

Defining Sociology of Knowledge

Before we proceed any further, it is important we clarify briefly what we understand by sociology of knowledge. Definitions of sociology of knowledge are widely divergent and I do not think a consensus will materialize soon. For the purpose of this lecture we will view sociology of knowledge a study of the relation between knowledge and society.

Overall, two key enquiry paths could be singled out that look into the relation between knowledge and society (following Berger and Luckmann, 1991):

> *Type of empirical variety of knowledge in human societies:* here researchers investigate for example what is knowledge; types of knowledge, thoughts, ideas in a society; here I would also add non-empirical variety of knowledge that will be discussed later on, and
>
> *Processes by which any type of knowledge comes to be socially established as reality:* here researchers investigate why and how knowledge is created, constructed, institutionalized and legitimated

The latter path of enquiry forms the foundation of my call for a Research Programme in Sociology of Knowledge. That is, the proposed Research Programme in Sociology of Knowledge will be concerned with the following questions:

- What is new knowledge or newness?
- What new knowledge or newness emerges?
- How and why newness emerges?
- What is the process by which knowledge or newness is socially established as *reality*?

My Passion for 'Newness'

Defining 'newness'

In the context of this lecture I define 'newness' as new products, technology, industry/sector, policy, forms of organizing, categories, trends, and practices and I conjecture herein that *newness is the main driver of knowledge creation*.

Apart of being my passion, 'newness' these days is on everyone's agenda: nationally, regionally, internationally, and globally. It is at the heart of the EU 2020 Agenda that states that: Europe's future is connected to its power to innovate. Recent trends in Europe, US, and globally have demonstrated that there is a lot of power to innovate out there, but most of the time with a *negative* sign, with a negative social impact. Recent *new* global responses in the fields of politics (Brexit, the election of the USA and French presidents), science and technology (GM crops, nuclear energy, fracking, global warming, AI, big data), health (eating disorders, immunisation, anti-biotic resistance), social (mass migration, extremism and terrorism, nationalism, sovereignty) are just handful examples of potential innovating powers. In our society of rapid change, seeking to cope with such complex, large scale *new* challenges to economic, social and political development, there is an urgent need for new perspectives, theories, approaches and methods to address how best to interpret and respond to escalating new challenges, committing to and ensuring a *positive* social impact.

My passion for newness

One of the best ways to explain complex phenomena is via examples. As I mentioned earlier I will be using examples from my own life experience, starting from my childhood, as these examples were easier to find, truth to be told. To put this into a context, I was raised in a family of doctors, school teachers and farmers. My father was a general surgeon and at the same time head of surgery section in the district hospital. My mom now retired was a nurse in the same hospital. As you may expect due to the nature of the job my parents had I was raised by my grandparents, and for a short period of time – you will find shortly why – by my grand-grandmother on my mother side. Behold – my parents did have their share in the division of labour as well. My dad was responsible for my chemistry, biology; my mom was responsible for my French in the school and my "French" during outside-school hours, as well as for curtailing my childish relentlessness to become context-free.

My first experiment

My first experiment in search for newness was when I was about 5 or 6 staying at my mother's grandparents who were school teachers of history and Romanian language and literature. In addition to being a school teacher of history, my granddad was also a school director – so as you may expect again I was left alone with my grand-grandmother. She was teaching me inter alia how to feed chickens, for example by feeding them with fresh grapes and grape leaves. As any respected households, my grand-parents would make wine. So it was one of those days in the autumn when the grapes were crushed and left to ferment to produce wine and this is when I decided to feed our chicken with this delicious, new product. I did it and went on playing around the house. Couple of hours later my grandparents came home to discover that all chickens were lying down, without moving – they thought they were dead. I was lucky that chickens were drunk and slowly were recovering from a huge hangover. So that was my first you may say scientific experiment seeking to understand either chickens' new behaviour or the introduction of new product to the market. But believe me – this was not the last experiment of this kind– but no time for that.

My first experience with new ventures

Another example in search for and pursuit of newness is when I stayed with my grandparents on my father side. They were farmers. In addition to farming my granddad was I would say an innovator and an entrepreneur. He was famous for his skills and knowledge in finding springs in the fields and building spring structures that would be used by travellers, shepherd, and animals. I would follow him observing how he would search for new springs. He had his own way of finding that out and now I regret I did not learn from him this technique – and not necessarily for the first time, I was also observing how he would assemble, what these days would be called, a team and resources, to actually build structures around newly found springs. Although the process might have looked the same, each new venture in finding and building new springs was unique. That is another example of 'newness' I experienced.

My first attempt to innovate

My first attempt to invent was when I did my first degree in mechanical engineering at the Air Force Engineering Military Academy in Riga. Before I tell the story of my attempt to invent, let me tell you another type of 'newness' I found myself in due to rapid and dramatic political, geopolitical, social changes and revolutions that were taking place during those turbulent times. I entered the Academy in 1987 – this is when Soviet Union was still a country. I graduated in the summer of 1992. This is when the Soviet Union collapsed, did not exist any longer. As a result, new countries were formed, including Russia, Latvia and Moldova. Hence, picture this: in 1992 I automatically became – though without any formal documents – a citizen of Moldova, serving in the Russian army that was stationed in a foreign country, Latvia. In other words I was stateless person. Here is an interesting sociological enquiry into the impact of such 'newness' of the world order on individual and country behaviours.

But let's get back to the example of 'newness' on innovation – my attempt to innovate during my studies at the Air Force Engineering Academy in Riga. I do not think – and am sure - at that time I was dreaming about inventing anything. For my diploma I had a problem and a question: how to make the engines of one of the nuclear bombers more efficient, for example – I am not revealing any secrets here by the way or discussing tactical details – a bomber taking off somewhere deep from a Russian territory would fly low – consuming less fuel with my new engine – be invisible to NATO radars and strike unexpectedly a NATO air-career located somewhere between Iceland and UK, and return successfully to the base.

I actually came with an idea on how to enhance efficiency – an idea that at the time was new for Soviet or NATO engines. The idea was to regulate the air flow between low and high pressure turbines – following similar principle of regulating the air between low and high pressure compressors. I did all mathematical calculations and indeed the results were phenomenal – addressing the problem and the tasks I mentioned above. However, the upset came from the lack of skills and time, as this I discovered 3-4 weeks before handing in the diploma – in properly designing the actual device needed to regulate the air between the turbines. I designed a prototype, even used aerodynamic tube at the Engineering Institute of Civil Aviation in Riga. That was my first attempt to innovate – might have been or still is an opportunity for a patent.

Other types of newness

After the graduation I quit the army and embarked on civil work. During approximately next 10 years after the graduation I was involved in pursuit of 'newness' in Moldova as part of various international organizations, e.g., I was part of several teams that led the conversion of military production sector into commercial production sector; initiated creation and development of the consulting sector; unbundled and restructured the power sector; recently contributed to rationalization and restructuring of the higher education.

My attempt at discovery

It seems my thirst and thrust for 'newness' continued during my PhD studies. In my PhD I took on two phenomena that were new and under-researched at the time that is in 2001: international entrepreneurship and de-internationalization. This work led to a development of number of organizational behavioural typologies which I will discuss later on.

Trying new venture creation waters

I came home to Moldova after graduation in 2005 and immediately was hired by an international NGO to set up its branch in Moldova. I embarked on this new adventure, set up the company and successfully managed it until 2010. What was also interesting about this NGO and its international branches from the 'newness' perspective was that it was a new form of organizing unknown to the Moldovan institutional environment. To understand how new this was or degree of 'newness', just imagine that I spent almost 5 months meeting and sitting with the Minister of Justice at least two times per month to discuss point-by-point the By-Law of this new venture.[1] By the way, during this time as CEO of this NGO, we sponsored a public hearing on ICT law and during that time in parallel Norman Fraser, my friend and colleague was trying to legitimate and institutionalize not only his new company, Endava, but equally or

[1] I present at length my experience in starting-up and growing this NGO in Turcan (2020a).

even more importantly legitimate and institutionalize the software sector in Moldova. That is another example of newness I will talk about in a minute.

Becoming Context-Free

Recap on newness

Before turning to 'becoming context-free', let's recap very few types of 'newness' I was trying to pursue over time. These are:

Exploring (chicken) **new** behaviour or introduction of new products
Exploring discovery and exploitation of **new** opportunities (spring)
Exploring the impact of **new** world order on individual and country behaviours (statelessness, confused citizenship)
Exploring **renewal** industry/sector restructuring (military, consulting, power, higher education)
Understanding **new** industry/sector creation and legitimation (software)
Understanding **new** venture creation and legitimation (software, dried fruit, NGO)

As you may observe these types of newness have one, common denominator, that is, each represents a *phenomenon* – a phenomenon that might be of interest to a community of researchers:

New product development
Entrepreneurship
Collective behaviour
Renewal of industries and sectors
New sector and new venture creation and legitimation

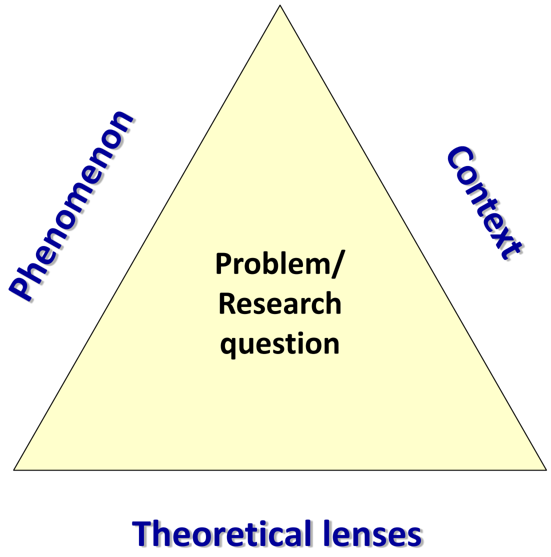
Introducing the phenomenon triangle

The relationship between phenomena under investigation, context, theoretical lenses, and problem and research question formulation could be exemplified in a simple framework (Figure 1). On the left side of the triangle we have a phenomenon, on the right side – a context; at the bottom – a theoretical lens or lenses and in the middle of the triangle – problem and/or research question formulation. I will use this framework to enhance our understanding of the relation between newness or phenomenon, 'becoming context-free' and knowledge creation.

Collective behaviour phenomenon

Let's plot one of the above identified phenomena – say collective behaviour. As researchers we might be interested in studying how 'newness' impact or affect collective behaviour. Clearly as a starting point in an investigation this is a quite broad scope; hence we need to zoom in and develop fine-grained problem, questions, and choose contexts. We might be interested in how market entry of new, radical products affect collective behaviour of consumers… as a research question this might be narrow enough in scope – what we need is a context or two.

Figure 1: Phenomenon triangle



The context with chicken is a perfect example – why not, if you have a (crazy) interest and appropriate methodology and methods or if you are – not so crazy – an entomologist or anthrozoologist who studies insects or animals, including their relationships with other animals, their environments, and human beings.

In his book 'Butterfly economics', Paul Ormerod (1999) gave an example from mid-80s when entomologists carried out a series of experiments with ants trying to understand and learn about individual and collective behaviour. For example, the researchers would constantly replenish a food pile which ants were visiting and found that an ant that went back and forth between their nest and constantly-replenished food pile would signal via chemical secretion to other ants about this pile and recruit more ants to go there for food. In economic terms this means that the behaviour of agents is influenced directly by the behaviour of others, and this type of behaviour could be found in many contexts of our life: stock market, revolutions, movies, new technology, new products, internationalization and globalization, Brexit and Trump phenomena. That is, by constantly comparing or investigating the phenomenon under investigation in different context, we would be able to discover basic social behaviour that transcends space and time.

As to the theories employed, we may employ one or two *new* theoretical frameworks to investigate your phenomenon. An analogy from the movie 'National treasure' is useful to exemplify the point. It is when Nicolas Cage was trying to see the writing on the back of the declaration of independence via a pair of glasses which had 2 pair of lenses: red and blue and by looking separately via each pair and combined he would see 3 different texts. The same is with theoretical lenses: by looking via one theoretical lens, the phenomenon you investigate is seen differently compared to when it is seen via another pair or combined. In this example, we may investigate the phenomenon by employing the lenses of rational choice, and beliefs and emotions theories.

Legitimation phenomenon

Here is another example: a study of the phenomenon of legitimation of newness aiming to generate a grand theory of legitimation (Figure 1, left side of the triangle). As a research question or a problem (centre of the triangle), we may ask how newness emerges and is being legitimated. Just to refresh what we said earlier about what we understand by newness: new products, technology, industry/sector, policy, forms of organizing, categories, trends, and practices. For example, we might be interested in investigating the emergence and legitimation of new political discourse or leaders (centre of the triangle). We may do that in the context of Brexit and/or Trump phenomenon/US elections (right side of the triangle) through the lenses of say 'blue ocean' and 'national identity' theories.

For example, the blue ocean strategy states that in order to be successful, new ventures shall avoid 'bloody red oceans' full of sharks, i.e., competitors, and instead, develop a niche market – a blue ocean – where it could swim alone and prosper. By investigating 'Trump phenomenon' we might make contribution to this theory, actually refuting it as you may refute the theory that all swans are white by finding at least one black swan. Trump did not avoid the bloody-red ocean full of heavy-weight politicians, but actually swam directly into this ocean and won the battle.

The discovery of latent – and by latent I mean hidden or unrecognized (Merton, 1996) – substantive or context specific patterns of behaviour – in this case of how new politicians emerge and get legitimated – could contribute to understanding of legitimation of newness phenomenon if we engage in comparative method whereby we compare our findings from this context with a related context – for example, the elections in France and the rise of Emmanuel Macron, non-politician but who also swam in the red ocean of French politics and won the elections; or in another context, say the emergence, legitimation and de-legitimation of UBER CEO.

Becoming context-free

As you observe, advancing, modifying and/or creating new understanding of a phenomenon requires that we detach ourselves from the initial context and investigate the phenomenon in question in other contexts. By context I mean hear empirical, theoretical and methodological. For example, attempting to develop a grand theory of legitimation of newness would require investigating this phenomenon in different contexts; the same applies when trying to develop a grand theory of collective behaviour – by constantly comparing (see also Glaser and Strauss, 1967) the findings from one context with another. *By constantly comparing different research* *contexts would allow researchers gradually move away from empirical, theoretical, and/or methodological contexts toward higher level of theory building or theorizing aiming to develop a general theory of phenomenon or discover basic social behaviour*. This is what I call becoming context-free. I will provide several examples later in the presentation when I will discuss the impact of becoming context-free on research, education, and knowledge creation.

Impact of Becoming Context-Free

When discussing the impact of becoming context-free I will first start by presenting several examples from my own recent experience in joint research and knowledge creation. When discussing this impact on education I will relate the impact of becoming context-free to the AAU PBL model, specifically how the model could be enhanced.

Impact on own voice: substantive theorizing

When we conduct any type of research, our key concern is how to create and/or find our voice and later – assuming or thinking we discovered one - whether we could defend it during the publication process and/or demonstrate or ensure its social impact. When we research a phenomenon within a context and limit our research with this investigation, we may discover own voice, for example; in form of a framework, model, hypothesis, propositions, typology, and synthesis. This is called substantive theory generation; in other words developing or discovering a theory applicable to this substantive area of enquiry or given empirical context. Hence, your own voice equals substantive theory discovered – in other words is applicable to the empirical context employed to investigate the phenomenon in question. In such research, both theoretical lenses and the context are important or relevant to theory generation.

Impact on own voice: discovering basic social behaviours

Curiosity shall not stop at the development of substantive theories. If during a substantive empirical research a social process or behaviour is emerging that explains say at least 80% of behaviour, then the researcher may – I would say shall – compare or apply the findings emerged in this context with other contexts. By constantly comparing the emergent social process or social behaviour with different contexts, researchers would be able to discover a basic social behaviour that transcends space and time – in other words it could explain most of respective social behaviour in multiple contexts at various points in time.

In this case researcher's own voice becomes stronger, being associated with a discovery of pattern of behaviour – basic social behaviour - that is context-free and that goes beyond state-of-the-art. It is has higher potential to make a significant positive social impact. As you may deduce from this exercise - *further into the comparative method, i.e., moving to a higher level of theorizing and theory building, further researcher moves away from his/her context, thus making it irrelevant* (compared to where she/he started the research). And as you may intuit, this type of own voice might be easier to defend during the publication or dissemination process.

I said 'might' because as any *new* thing – as discussed above about newness – newly discovered basic social processes require to be legitimated in the eyes of existing paradigm or doctrines holders. Let me give you several examples.

In one of the AIB conferences I attended a doctoral consortium. A doctoral researcher presented his thesis, his progress to-date and was seeking feedback from the panel. In the panel there was one of the founding fathers of MNE theory – keeping this quite broad not to reveal the identity, who – in one of the comments to this doctoral researcher – used a metaphor to explain the importance of *the* MNE theory, saying that 'this MNE theory is like a religion'. Now imagine how difficult, especially for novice researchers, almost impossible is to bring change to, never mind change, a religion. As Thomas Khun (1996, p. 47) stated in his 'Structure of Scientific Revolution' that academic discourse:

> "*…is regularly marked by frequent and deep debates over legitimate methods, problems, and standards of solution, though these serve rather to define schools than to produce agreement*".

Another example of how difficult to defend your new, voice when you discover basic social processes is presented below:

> *"…we put our ideas into a working paper format and distributed it to a small number of colleagues. The reaction of our colleagues was decidedly mixed. While several were very supportive, a few others were highly critical. The colleagues that were supportive of the paper generally suggested improving the theoretical justification of the argument. We subsequently spent time acquainting ourselves with the cognitive psychology literature and buttressing the theoretical framework. Our more critical colleagues felt that the research was too qualitative, not empirical, not statistical, and/or divorced from the evolving paradigm for explaining diversity and performance. At least one suggested that we should just give up and start over with a 'more scientific study'".*

This is a historical perspective from then-two-young, non-tenured scholars who later became well-known in strategic management field – Bettis and Prahalad (1995, p. 6). It might be inferred that in such situations when you have discovered your voice that transcends time, space *and* theoretical contexts, success in legitimating your voice and thus taking on existing paradigm or doctrine holders or "priests" might depend on your courage, boldness, and not least on support from your senior colleagues.

Impact on my own voice

To conclude with the impact on own voice, I want to bring in *my own* experience, own situation I found myself in to a degree similar to Bettis and Prahalad. It is a historical perspective on how I came up with my own voice – radical from existing evolving paradigm, but failed to aggressively pursue this voice, hence challenge established gatekeepers of evolving paradigm of international entrepreneurship.

I did my PhD on the phenomenon of de-internationalization or simply put on withdrawal of organizations from international markets (Figure 1, left side of the triangle), asking how and why organizations de-internationalize or withdraw from international markets (centre of the triangle). The empirical context of my research was software sector in Scotland located in Silicon Glen – a sister or brother of Silicon Valley – located between Edinburgh and Glasgow; time period: before, during and right after the dot.com bubble (right side of the triangle). I looked at this phenomenon wearing international business glasses, entrepreneurship glasses, and since international entrepreneurship (IE) is at the intersection of IB and Entrepreneurship then I combined the two glasses to get a new perspective on IE.

In 2001 I started my PhD with an existing definition of IE published in one of the leading journals, AMJ (Table 1, first row). Two years later, in 2003, as a result of reviewing and synthesizing IB, entrepreneurship literatures and combining the two, I discovered an alternative definition of IE (Table 1, second row). I shared my definition with on one of the leading scholars in entrepreneurship, Shaker Zhara who told me: *this is great, publish it*. Well, it was easy for him to say to challenge the mainstream, evolving paradigm.

Table 1: My own voice

Authors	Year	Definition
McDougall & Oviatt	***2000***	**IE is a combination of innovative, proactive, and risk-seeking behaviour that crosses national borders and is intended to create value in organizations**
Turcan	***2003***	**IE is a process of discovering and exploiting international venture ideas that are intended to create new values in organizations and in the marketplace.**
Oviatt & McDougall	***2005***	**IE is the discovery, enactment, evaluation, and exploitation of opportunities – across national borders – to create future goods and services.**

Later I partnered with a PhD fellow from Finland – probably still being afraid to go alone into the battle – and presented this definition in 2004 at McGill IE Conference that is the key, annual conference for IE scholars (Turcan and Makela, 2004). In hindsight, I should not have been afraid and pursue this route more tenaciously. And I did not; probably I was afraid; not ready; do not know – but the bottom line is that I did not fully pursue the publication route – I thought maybe I would do it after my VIVA with more authority.

In the year of my thesis submission, 2005, I discovered that the same authors who published their definition of IE in 2000, published another one that suspiciously looked the same as mine from 2003 (Table 1, third row). Differences might appear minor, but they are fundamental as both definitions have different philosophical and conceptual assumptions.

In 2012 I organized a special session at the main IE conference – McGill International Entrepreneurship Conference. The title of this special session was "Theory building in international entrepreneurship". I invited 3 distinguished scholars as discussants to my session: Jean-François Hennart; Sabine Urban; and Antonella Zucchella. In the audience was one of the authors of the IE alternative definition, Patricia McDougall. After the presentation Patricia came to me and said – "I liked your presentation; you remind me of Henry Mintzberg". Thanking for her compliment – till these days I do hope that was a compliment - I asked Patricia whether she would consider the opportunity to open up a community debate and engage in it to discuss differences between these two definitions (as you may guess I presented my definition and contrasted it with theirs during that special session). To what she declined my offer. I will publish my definition in due time - at least the fear is gone.

Impact on basic social behaviour discovery

To illustrate the impact of becoming context-free on knowledge creation, I will use several examples from my own research and joint research and joint project application with colleagues. I will discuss the impact from academic, practice and policy perspectives.

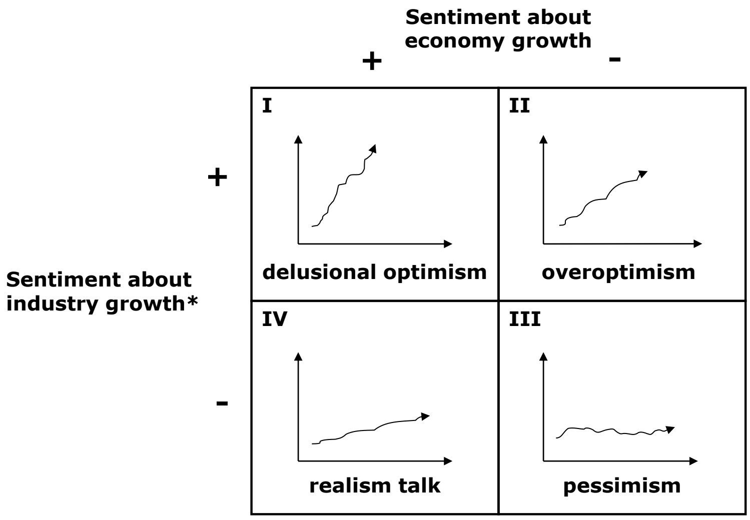
Typology of hype

One of the outputs of my thesis was the typology of hype (Figure 2, Turcan 2011). Without going into many details, the typology theorizes: how bubbles are formed – QI; how they continue to expand despite some correcting signals that come from macro environment – QII; how they bursts – QIII, and how all come to senses – QIV. Just to remind you that I discovered this typology by investigating the context of international new ventures during and after the dot.com bubble, that withdrew from international markets.

You may imagine my - professional of course - joy and excitement when financial and housing bubble hit in 2008. I started comparing and applying this typology to the new bubble formed in different contexts. The conjectures made by the typology and assumptions it was based on were confirmed by the evolution of the financial and housing bubble; in 2012 with a colleague of mine from the University of Rhode Island, Nik Dholakia we started working on further theory development on bubble formation by inductively comparing bubble formation in more contexts. The results were published in the Foresight journal[2] and later in the book titled: "Toward a Metatheory of Economic Bubbles: Socio-Political and Cultural Perspectives" (Dholakia and Turcan, 2013; 2014).

[2] Our 2013 paper – Dholakia and Turcan (2013) – received EMERALD award for highly commending paper.

Figure 2: Typology of hype



Note: * At the moment of creating new industry or new demand within an existing industry

Typology of legitimation

Another typology that emerged from my thesis was the typology of legitimation (Figure 3, revised version).[3] Around 2008 or 2009 I got introduced to Norman Fraser who at the time was in Silicon Valley working on his next venture and who recently successful finalized another one in the Valley; we started our cooperation by investigating how Norman launched and legitimated what now is the largest software company in Moldova and how he and via his venture in Moldova contributed to the creation and legitimation of the software sector in Moldova. Via this research we managed to apply this typology not only to a new context, software companies in Moldova, but also at new level of analysis, that is the level of industry. We presented our first findings at a software conference at MIT in 2012 (Turcan and Fraser, 2012) and later published them in 2016 in the IJEM (Turcan and Fraser, 2016).[4]

One of the key findings that emerged from this research was that *in order for new sectors or industries to be created in emerging industries it is critical that the actors involved invest in legitimacy building alongside capacity building*; our first conjecture. We further conjectured that *without investing in legitimacy building, the investment in capacity building alone will not yield successful results*; our second conjecture.

As we well know, in the emerging economies the tendency of development organizations such as EBRD or DANIDA is to invest in capacity building in an attempt to create or boost the creation of new sectors and industries. Norman suggested testing the typology and our conjectures at one of the leading development organizations, EBRD. He arranged a meeting with 2 leading economists in the bank. When we presented the typology and our conjectures,

[3] This revised version is presented in Turcan (2018), forthcoming in Turcan and Fraser (2018) Palgrave Handbook of Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Entrepreneurship.
[4] Our 2016 paper – Turcan and Fraser (2016) – received EMERALD award for highly commending paper.

the reaction of the two was immediate. They did acknowledge that as development organization EBRD shall operate in QI, but because of high risks, EBRD invests in capacity building in QII instead. They gave examples of 3 countries in Africa EBRD invested in capacity building in an effort to create new sectors with zero results – that is no new sectors or industries were created. They acknowledged that in fact people with enhanced capacity for non-existing sectors 'migrated' to existing sectors or industries located either in the country or abroad. Hence the third conjecture: *without legitimacy building, people with enhanced capacity for non-existing sectors will migrate to existing sectors or industries located in the country or abroad*. We then discussed how legitimation building together with capacity building would enhance the likelihood of the creation of new sector or industry in emerging economies.

Figure 3: Typology of legitimation

State of the organization	State of the sector: New/Emergent	State of the sector: Established
New/Emergent	**I** **Create & legitimate** ***Crossing the gulf*** (uncertain decision making setting)	**II** **Create & legitimate** ***Fitting in*** (risk decision making setting)
Established	**IV** **Defend legitimacy** **Create & legitimate** **De-legitimize** **De-institutionalize** ***Challenging status-quo***	**III** **Maintain legitimacy** **Defend legitimacy**

These conjectures were also later validated by our colleagues in Tanzania who observed the same, what we called earlier – basis social behaviour – that despite substantial investment in capacity building to start a new sector or industry, people were migrating to other sectors located in the country or abroad. Together with colleagues from Tanzania, Norman and I put together in 2015 a proposal for funding to DANIDA to research and contribute to new sector creation in Tanzania.

Well, guess what happened – DANIDA rejected our application (while Danish Embassy in Tanzania recommended our project for funding). This is another example when gatekeepers of an established paradigm were challenged; they saw this new theory as a threat rather than an opportunity to positively enhance the social impact. Indeed, who would like to hear and eventually accept that a development organization is in the business of throwing good money after bad money "invested" in capacity building with the aim to stimulate new sector creation.

More examples

I would just briefly mention another two basic social processes that emerged from my thesis and which have applicability in other settings, i.e., transcend space and time. These are: Typology of goal alignment (Turcan, 2008) and Typology of captivity (Turcan, 2012). You may read about them by accessing these articles on my VBN page and as homework you may engage in thought experiments by comparing and applying these typologies to your empirical contexts trying to become context-free – and I would be happy to discuss your discoveries.

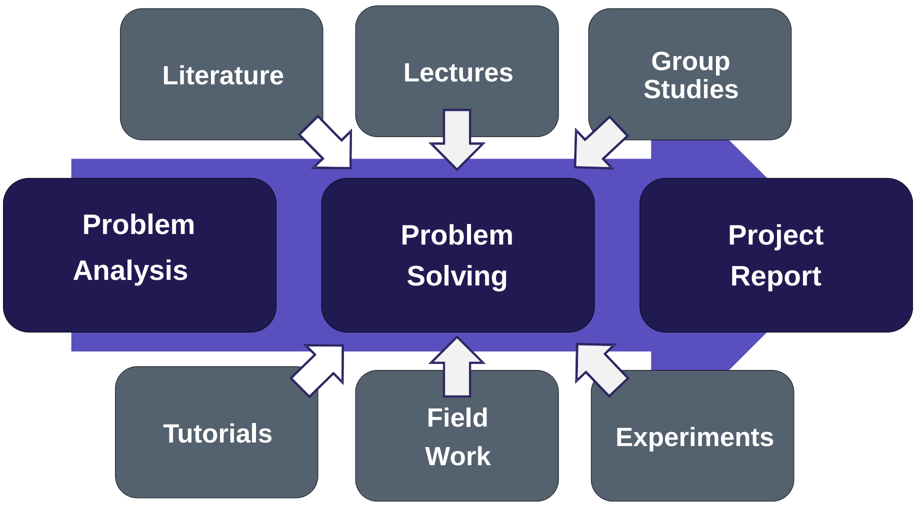
Impact on education

Now let's move on to discuss the impact of becoming context-free on teaching and learning. To do that, I need first to introduce our AAU PBL model and then to present my recommendations on how it could be enhanced by incorporating 'becoming context-free' approach.

AAU model

All of us are familiar with AAU PBL model (Figure 4). The model is founded on two key assumptions. First assumption is that the project work is at its centre, consisting of problem analysis, problem solving and project report. The second assumption is that the other teaching and learning activities such as literature, lectures, group studies, and tutorials are designed to support the project work. Among other things what this relation accomplishes is that it facilitates students' self-directed learning.

Figure 4: AAU PBL model

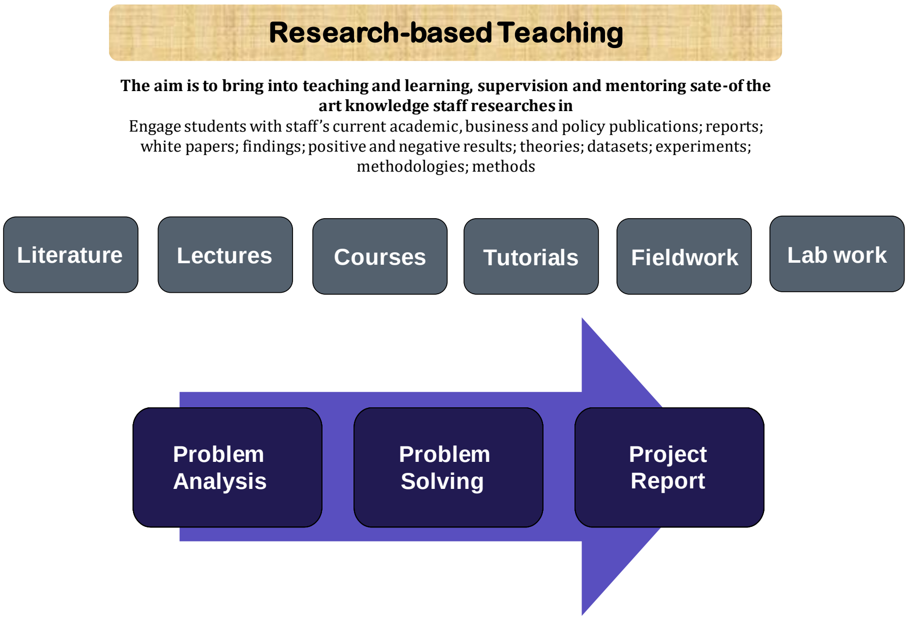


Before we move any further let me suggest my first enhancement to the model. Namely, I suggest introducing in the first box the concept of '*discovery*' as I strongly believe it is critical for the students to gain knowledge, skills and competences also in the discovery of a problem. These peripheral activities displayed here and which we are engaged in on a daily basis are '*research-based teaching*' activities. For the reasons you will see in a moment I reorganize these activities as presented in this framework (see Figure 5).

AAU model: Research-based teaching

As academic staff when we engage in all these research-based teaching activities we aim to bring to our teaching and learning classes the sate-of the art of the field we are researching in (Figure 5). With this we aim to expose the students to our own academic, business and policy research and publications, reports, white papers; findings; results, incl., negative ones; theories; datasets, experiments, methodologies, methods.

Figure 5: AAU PBL Model: Research-based teaching



Source: Turcan, 2020b

How this relates to my topic you may ask. Well, when we bring state-of-the-art or most recent developments in a field to our classes more often than not teaching is centred on specific contexts, methods, theories and philosophical assumptions that dominate that field. For example if we bring in state-of-the-art in International Business, this would mean exposing the students to recent developments in IB theory, methodology and methods in the context of MNEs.

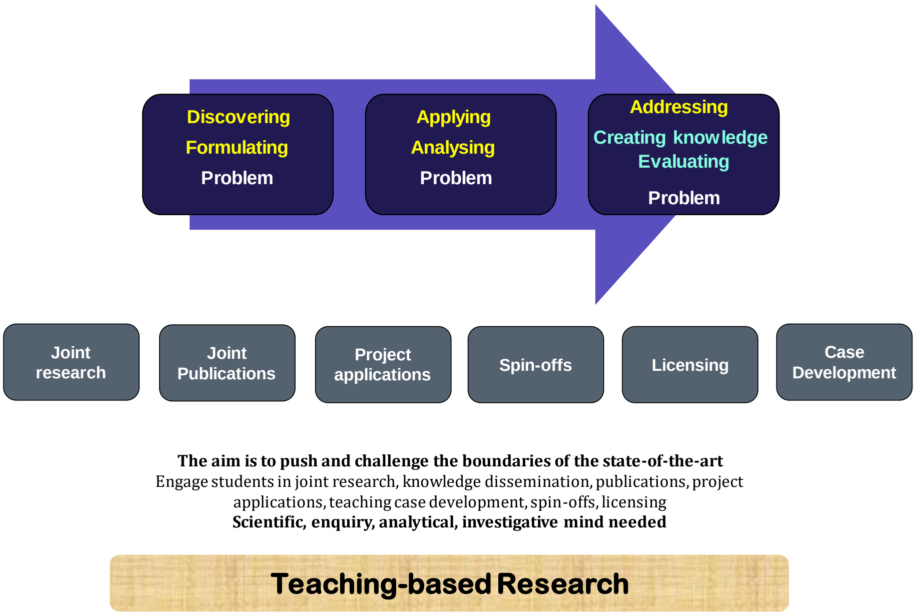
There is nothing wrong with this approach – au contraire – it is something we all shall actively engage in and pursue. However, to complete the puzzle of knowledge creation, taking advantage of the role 'becoming context-free' plays in knowledge creation we need to add another component to our AAU PBL model: *teaching-based research* (Figure 6).

AAU PBL model enhanced

This new dimension of the AAU PBL Model is in line with AAU and Faculty 2021 Strategies that emphasize inter alia:

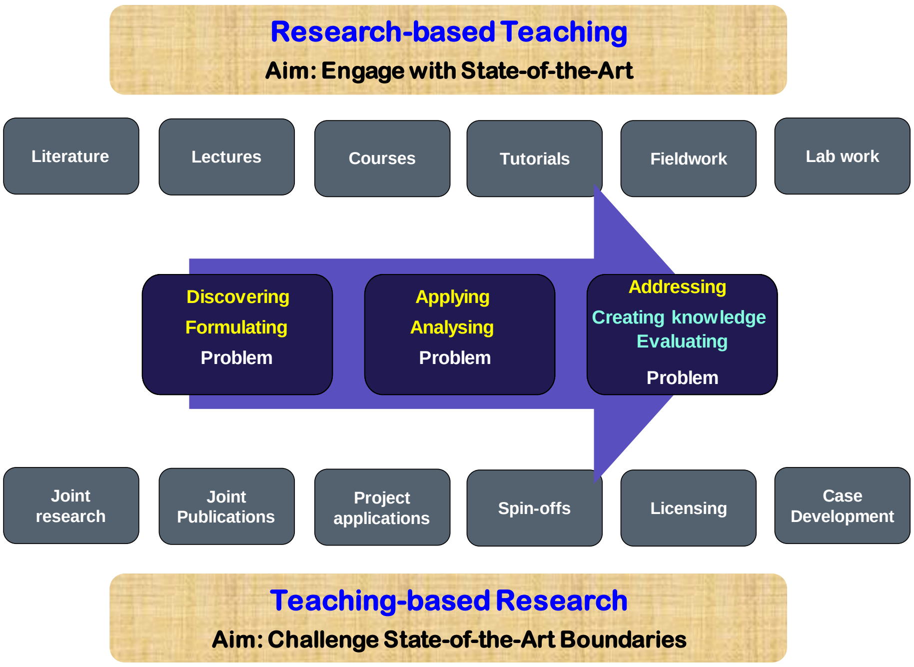
"…the involvement of our students in concrete research activities by developing wide range of initiatives to encourage the researchers and the students to participate actively in knowledge collaboration".

Figure 6: AAU PBL model enhanced: Teaching-based research



Source: Turcan, 2020b

Figure 7: AAU holistic PBL model



Source: Turcan, 2020b

Compared to research-based teaching, the aim of teaching-based research is to push and why not challenge the boundaries of the state-of-the-art (Figure 6). That is we need to go beyond current contexts, methods, theories and philosophical assumptions. And as in research-based teaching, we shall actively engage the students in teaching-based research. However, the latter is different from the former. That is – in teaching-based research – the students will cooperate with the faculty in co-creating new knowledge being involved in staff's own research, knowledge dissemination, joint publication, project application.

As you may realize this new dimension of teaching-based research to teaching and learning requires development of students' new and different knowledge, skills and competences centred on nurturing scientific, enquiry, analytical and investigative minds. How teaching-based research could be fully imbedded in existing curricula is yet to be seen. This new AAU holistic PBL model (Figure 7) might be used as a framework in one of project applications submitted for internal, national and international funding.[5]

Applying enhanced AAU PBL model

Before we move to the last part of our lecture, I would like to give you an example of teaching-based research from my own experience. I know some of our colleagues from the department already started implementing this activity following my presentation of the enhanced AAU PBL model two years ago at the Department meeting.

Between 2012 and 2015 I was coordinating a million-euro EU-funded project aimed at enhancing university autonomy in Moldova (www.euniam.aau.dk). One of the dimensions investigated by the project was the relation between university internationalization and university autonomy. To research this phenomenon, I joined forces with Valeria Gulieva who at that time was doing her master thesis. We set to investigate how and more importantly why universities engage in advanced internationalization to emerging markets. By advanced internationalization I mean green field investments, e.g., building campuses and not e.g., staff or student exchange, or research collaboration. Our starting point was to look at this phenomenon via the lenses of IB theories. Nothing unusual was emerging – universities were behaving as any MNE. But when we started putting on different theoretical glasses to investigate this phenomenon, namely the theory of university autonomy, very interesting things started to emerge.

To understand one of our key findings let's briefly explain what the theory of university autonomy consists of. It consists of 4 types of autonomy, namely organizational autonomy – university freedom to decide on its organization and organizing; financial autonomy – university freedom to decide on its teaching and research funding and investment policies; HR

[5] The ideas behind this enhanced AAU PBL model emerged during the implementation of an EU ERASMUS+ funded project that I coordinated between 2015-2019 titled: Introducing Problem Based Learning in Moldova: Toward Enhancing Students' Competitiveness and Employability (www.pblmd.aau.dk).

autonomy – university autonomy to decide on its personnel hiring and incentives policies; and academic autonomy – university freedom in teaching and research.

In other words, the context within which *any* university operates is defined by its organizational, financial, HR and academic autonomy. It actually defines what a university is, what it stands for, its mission at the end of the day. As expected these types of autonomy will vary – sometime substantially – from one country to another, say between developed and developing or emerging countries; e.g., Denmark and China.

Applying IB lenses to our question suggests that according to the conventional wisdom of the established IB paradigm universities – like MNEs – in their internationalization efforts should adapt their strategies, resources, structures and organization to international environments. Following this conventional wisdom we made the following conjecture (Turcan and Gulieva, 2016, p. 2015):

> "*the process of university internationalization and its sustainability are determined by the structure and exercise of university autonomy settings at home and in the host (target) countries, and that the process itself cannot be successfully achieved and maintained without changes in the autonomy settings*".

In other words, to be successful in its advanced internationalization efforts, a university shall adapt to and/or adopt university autonomy settings of the country it internationalizes to.

However – with university autonomy glasses on – we argue that the challenge in pursuing such 'wisdom' is to what degree universities, embracing new, dissimilar and sometimes conflicting dimensions of organizational, financial, HR, and academic autonomy of the host country, compromise key aspects of their own autonomy and core mission. This raises immediate concerns about the erosion of individual and university-wide autonomy and concerns about the sustainability of university internationalization efforts. This led us to conjecture that:

> "*advanced internationalization of universities is unethical*",

as by changing or adapting own autonomy settings to the university autonomy context in the target market the internationalizing university will or may compromise its values, what it stands for, its organizational, financial, HR and quite importantly academic autonomy.

The social impact of this conjecture can and shall not be ignored. Our universities couple of years ago engaged in advanced internationalization via green field investment in China. At this point what I would like to say is that understanding the implications of this conjecture that "*advanced internationalization of universities is unethical*" is crucial to the success of this advanced internationalization of Danish universities in China.[6]

[6] A further discussion on the conjecture that 'advanced internationalization of universities is unethical' can be found in Turcan et al, 2020a.

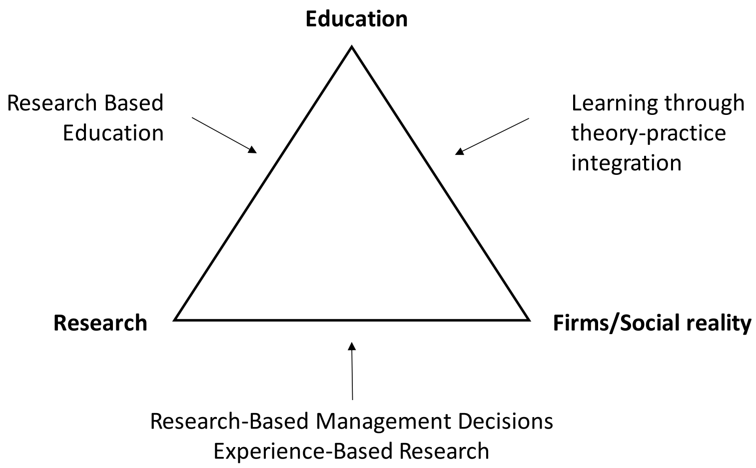
This teaching-based research activity was possible by cooperating with a master student in challenging the boundaries of the state of the art (Figure 7) by investigating the same phenomenon –internationalization of organizations – in a different context via different theoretical lenses. Before this research, I would teach and explain to the students the advanced internationalisation of universities within the state-of-the-art of the IB field.

Toward a Research Program in Sociology of Knowledge

In the remaining part of my lecture I will introduce a proposal, a vision for an inter-disciplinary research programme in sociology of knowledge building on the notions of newness and becoming context-free. Alongside 'newness' and 'becoming context-free' concepts that glue this research programme, I introduce another concept as a "super-glue", namely *theory building*. These three together – newness, becoming context-free, and theory building – will empower researchers through synthesis, induction, and theorizing among other things to distil corpora of massively new complex human and organizational behaviour aiming to discover latent patterns of behavioural structures and regularities – all contributing to a richer, theoretically explicated understanding of such new behaviours.

How this programme is different from what we already do, you may ask. Indeed, at AAU we are very good in integrating research, education and business/policy collaboration (Figure 8). We engage in research-based teaching, our students learn how to apply theories in practice – be this private or public, and we as researchers collaborate with private and public organizations to create and transfer new knowledge. In other words, AAU is an excellent environment that is dedicated to 'the usefulness of useful knowledge'.

Figure 8: Socially engaged university



Source: Sorensen (2020)

Space dedicated to 'the usefulness of useless knowledge'

The vision for this research programme is to create a space dedicated to 'the usefulness of useless knowledge' as once put by Abraham Flexner in 1939 – a visionary who shaped the development of the Institute of Advanced Study at Princeton. In other words, alongside the extant excellence in *applied* research, teaching, and knowledge transfer, this research programme will stimulate and foster *fundamental* research, education and knowledge transfer. It will always tend to go beyond state-of-the-art. Hence the word 'useless' – when the practical use or practical consequences of new knowledge discovered might not be visible at once, but the research questions it will further generate will without any doubt trigger interesting, 'useful' enquiries (Flexner, 1939). An example of 'useless knowledge' might be Max Weber's 'ideal types' that are theoretical concepts that can or may never be found in reality, but are essential to capture holistically, equally important elegantly or beautifully a 'useful' or 'real' phenomenon.

In pursuit of 'useless knowledge'

The pursuit of "useless knowledge" does not mean we have to be reluctant to attack real-world, practical problems – au contraire – we must stay on top of the current trends in multiple contexts, seize across-the-board theoretical inferences that might be or appear "useless" at the moment, but that might become "useful" later on through an 'a-ha' revelation, or by stimulating 'useful' debates and enquires in a research community. Recent trends I mentioned at the start of the lecture [display them] are good examples of sources of 'useless knowledge'. Let me give you an example of creating 'useless' knowledge from my recent experience.

In summer of 2015, one of my MSc students, Behnam Boujarzadeh, successfully defended his master thesis (BTW, this is yet another example of teaching-based research]. Together with Behnam we developed a framework that Behnam used to investigate the phenomenon of emergence and evolution of industries in the context of Danish Fashion and Textile Industry. I shared the results with my colleague Nikhilesh Dholakia. During one of our scholarly conversations, Nik and I, reflecting on Behnam's results and on the global trends at a time, came up with a proposition that '*the world is in the late stage of globalization*', the state we coined: '*late globalization*'.

Within the Theory Building Research Programme (TBRP, www.tbrp.aau.dk) we started "**TBRP Perspectives**" (https://www.tbrp.aau.dk/perspectives/) and wrote in 2015 several essays on this topic, discussing a number of aspects of late globalization, incl., de-globalization. Following these essays Nik and I continued our theorising by developing a framework of late globalization, that at first could be seen as a piece of 'useless knowledge' (Figure 9; no worries, I will not go through to explain this framework].[7]

[7] A brief introduction to the Late Globalization framework presented in Figure 9 may be found in Turcan (2016).

Nik, Behnam and I employed part of the late globalization framework to explain the emergence and evolution of the Danish Fashion and Textile Industry in a paper we presented at DRUID conference in 2016 (Dholakia, Turcan and Boujarzadeh, 2016). By the reaction of the audience to our paper at DRUID one could easily observe that 'late globalization' was not something that interests, ignites or provokes. Throughout 2016, when Nik and I would present the late globalization in other forums, the same reaction would follow. Nonetheless, we continued our theorising, incl., going back to the Danish Fashion and Textile Industry data and discovering new insights and new ways of interpreting the results. We presented these at DRUID conference this year in June (Turcan, Boujarzadeh Dholakia, 2017).[8]

Figure 9: Late globalization framework

Focal Entity (Level of Analysis)	***Nature or Character of 'Lateness of Globalization'***			
	Phasic	***Chronological***	***Categorical***	***Processual***
Globe/Planet	Globe-Phasic			Globe-Processual
Nation	Nation-Phasic	Nation-Chronological	Nation-Categorical	Nation-Processual
Sector	Sector-Phasic	Sector-Chronological		Sector-Processual
Industry	Industry-Phasic	Industry-Chronological		Industry-Processual
Firm	Firm-Phasic	Firm-Chronological	Firm-Categorical	Firm-Processual
Group	Group-Phasic	Group-Chronological	Group-Categorical	Group-Processual

What was interesting to observe at 2017 DRUID conference was that there was a panel dedicated to the phenomenon of de-globalization, titled: *DRUID panel on de-globalization*. Here are several questions the panel was set to address (DRUID, 2017):

- What are the implications of de-globalization for the development of cities, multinational enterprises, and innovation policy?
- How does de-globalization affect cities and companies as engines of economic prosperity?
- Which technologies are enabled and which are hampered by de-globalization?
- Are we heading for a period of national battles for technological leadership akin to the space wars of the 1960s?
- Can we offer any insights on when large-scale tech innovation create jobs?

In April 2017 I attended AIB UK chapter conference that took place at Henley Business School. At the conference there was also a panel linked to 'late globalization' phenomenon, titled: *The tail-end of globalization: three views*. The panel aimed to discuss winners and losers of globalization, impact of globalization on competition, unemployment, and wage decline; macro and micro levels in general.

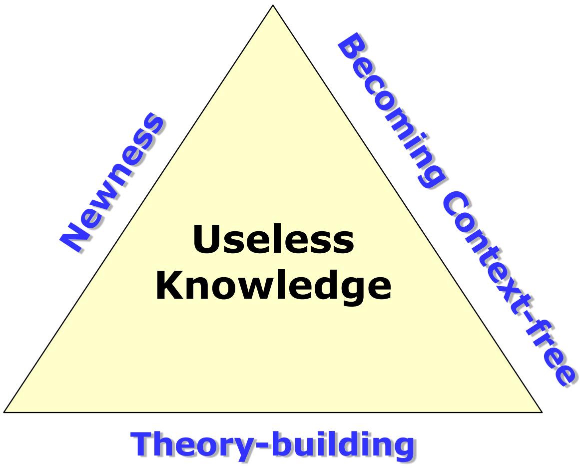
[8] The paper was published in 2020 in Thunderbird International Business Review: Turcan et al, 2020b.

These two events clearly gave us an encouragement. As you may notice some if not all questions raised by the DRUID and AIB-UK panels could be addressed or explored by employing our framework of late globalization (Figure 9). In other words, what seemed to be 'useless knowledge' in 2015 started to become 'useful' two years later.

Tentative questions to pursue

It seems triangle is the most common and why not effective way of explicating; I will employ this approach here to conceptualize the proposed Programme. As I briefly mentioned earlier three key elements will "glue" or form the foundation of this Programme, namely *newness*, *context-free becoming* and *theory building* – all aimed to produce 'useless knowledge' that in turn will stimulate interesting, 'useful' enquiries (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Three pillars of the Programme



As mentioned earlier, these are examples of questions that the Programme may pursue in search for 'useless knowledge'. In relation to newness, the following questions could be addressed:

- What is new knowledge or newness?
- What type of new knowledge or newness emerges?
- How and why newness emerges?
- What is the process by which knowledge or newness is socially established as *reality*?

In becoming context-free, researchers will investigate the above questions in multiple, different contexts dealing with social conditions and social effects of newness as well as with social structures and social processes of legitimation and institutionalization of newness at macro, meso and micro levels.[9]

[9] Inspired by these ideas, I applied and received 4.4 mil EUR funding in 2019 from Marie S. Curie ITN action to start in 2020 an European Training Network titled: *Legitimation of Newness and Its Impact on EU Agenda for Change* (www.lnetn.aau.dk)

The organization

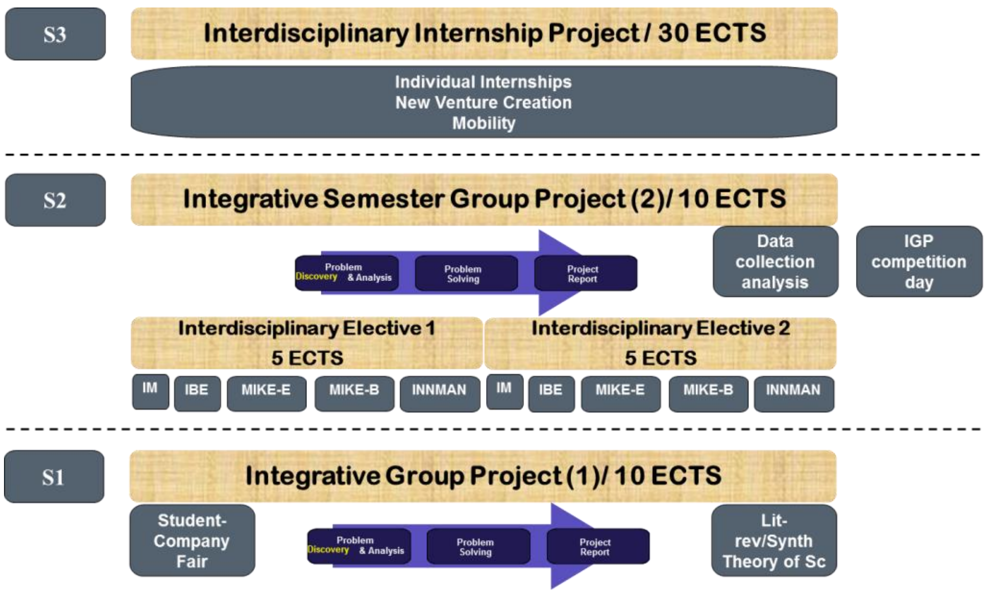
The proposed research programme will serve as a platform, hub that will bring together our researchers *and* international researchers from diverse disciplinary backgrounds, with complimentary theoretical and conceptual approaches, techniques, methodologies and instrumentation, goals and motivations – all passionate about newness, becoming context-free, theory building in the pursuit of "useless knowledge".

At the same time we will have to sharpen our methods in theorising and theory building from quantitative and qualitative data. We shall also sharpen our meta-theoretical or methodological techniques to be able to make sense of our becoming context-free and becoming theory-free. In this context I define *method* as a scientific procedure that specifies the tools, techniques, steps which must be taken to achieve a given end; and *methodology* as a philosophical study of the plurality of methods which are applied in various scientific disciplines, contexts.

As with any entrepreneurial, new ventures – and the proposed Programme could be seen as such – we shall start small, in a true 'effectuation' way: our Department could be a testbed for implementing the Programme. The wide, multi-disciplinary scope of research at our Department in organization and strategy, accounting and auditing, international business and marketing, creativity and innovation, entrepreneurship and business models, economics, health economics, and theory building is a rich source of variety of newness, contexts, methods and methodologies.

At the education level, we may gradually incorporate the Programme into the AAU PBL model and respectively in the learning curricular (see Figures 7 and 11].

Figure 11: Cross-disciplinary teaching and learning



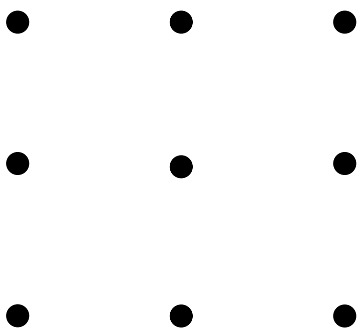
On one side, we will continue research-based teaching and learning by focusing on state-of-the-art knowledge and 'useful' knowledge. On the other side, we will nurture teaching-based research by going beyond state-of-the-art aiming to co-produce with our students 'useless' knowledge.

We will need to operate a number of changes in our curricular in order to successfully incorporate this new dimension – teaching-based research – into the AAU PBL model, to develop students' new and different knowledge, skills and competences centred on nurturing scientific, enquiry, analytical and investigative minds. One of the ways to achieve this is to facilitate cross- and multi-disciplinary teaching and learning across our Master programmes as presented in Figure 11.

Testing Your Knowledge

Since 'becoming context-free' was one of the key concepts in my lecture, I would like to test your understanding of the concept before I move to my final remarks. I would like you to solve a puzzle (Figure 12) – of course without any help from the Internet: these nine dots are to be connected by four straight lines without lifting the pencil from the paper.

Figure 12: nine-dot puzzle



I will give you two minutes after which either you or I will provide a solution. Those who know about this puzzle please raise your hand as soon as I put the puzzle and please keep quiet during these three minutes.

Has anyone found a solution to the puzzle? Before I reveal a solution, let's imagine that these dots represent say a research agenda or realm in a research group. As you will see in a moment, according to Watzlawick et al. (1974), the solution to the puzzle demands from us to:

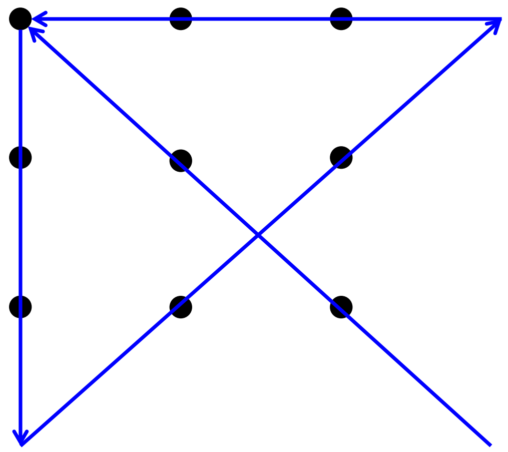
(i) stop studying the dots – which represent an empirical reality a research group is studying – in a specific context
(ii) stop wearing 'used' theoretical lenses
(iii) stop employing 'familiar' methodologies and methods

Instead the solution to this problem demands from us to:

(i) start examining and questioning the assumptions about the dots – or empirical reality by
(ii) becoming context-free
(iii) putting on new theoretical lenses, and
(iv) employing untried methods and methodologies.

A solution to the puzzle is provided in Figure 13.

Figure 13: A solution to the nine-dot puzzle



Final Remarks

As this is an academic forum, I cannot escape from not discussing – no matter how briefly – the research method I employed in this lecture. Usually you present your research method at the beginning. But from our experience at the IBC centre, whenever you want a staff meeting to end quicker, just initiate a discussion on research methods and methodology and then the meeting is over in a blink of an eye. Since I will end the lecture in less than three minutes I will make this attempt anyway.

The method I employed in my lecture was autoethnography. It is a method that sits at the intersection of autobiography and ethnography. By employing this method, a researcher seeks to attain universal understanding (Bruner, 1986) grounded in aesthetic, evocative and analytic thick descriptions of personal and interpersonal experience (Ellis et al., 2011). I used storytelling, thick descriptions of personal and social experiences aiming to understand becoming context-free phenomenon and its impact on research and education.

This method is a promising one, especially given our strong cooperation with private and public sectors whereby we may for example conduct collaborative autoethnographic research where the researcher and the entrepreneur co-construct the narrative creating new, fine-grained knowledge.

In the spirit of this lecture that calls for the creation of a space dedicated to 'the usefulness of useless knowledge', the proposed ***Research Programme in Sociology of Useless Knowledge*** might be considered *at this point in time* 'useless'. However, I strongly believe it will become 'useful' sooner rather than later.

And finally, I would like to finish with a quote by Gottfried Leibniz (1694) from his work 'On the improvement of metaphysics, and on the concept of substance' – a quote that is very relevant today:

> *"The true and fruitful concepts, not only of substance, but also of cause, action, relation, similitude, and of most of the other general terms, manifestly remain unknown at large."*

Thank you very much for your patience and listening.

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