

# Review of Integral Development

Schieffer, Alexander and Lessem, Ronnie. (2014). *Integral Development. Realising the Transformative Potential of Individuals, Organisations and Societies*, London: Ashgate Gower.

## Reviewed by Wendelin Küpers<sup>1</sup>

We are living in a transformative time facing radical challenges of and in urgent need for a more integral understanding of development, conceptually and critically that are opening up genuinely new pathways for thinking and acting. In their book Alexander Schieffer and Ronnie Lessem offer a contribution which does this excellently, and in detailed ways.

For quite some time the authors of this comprehensive book have been engaged in developing and putting into practice and what they call “Integral Worlds approach,” articulated in several books, articles and projects. Their *Integral Worlds* is a much to be welcomed project for understanding and consciously designing evolving human systems.

In this timely and useful publication they show how a more considered and complex comprehension of development, qualified as an integral one, looks like.

Offering multiple entry points into the book and approaching integral development they invite the reader to a journey, for which they offer rationales, maps with compasses as well as orientating contents, guiding questions and illustrating cases as well as conceptual tables and figures.

Accordingly, their presentation of integral development is systematic and principled, methodologically and normatively, and this integrating style of thought exemplifies itself what the book is all about.

Starting by contextualising and problematizing non-integral development and the need for more integrative understandings and realisations of the same, they are setting the scene for the following detailing chapters, organised in distinct but interrelated main parts.

While the first part problematizes the divided worlds we are in and the need for renewing human development, the second part presents new integral perspectives on human development. The subsequent parts outline in detail the four directions and realms of an integral development (ranging from restoring life in nature and community, regenerating meaning via culture and

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spirituality, to reframing knowledge via science, systems and technology up to rebuilding infrastructure and institutions via enterprise and economics. In particular, the authors invited to travel through the ‘Southern’ realm of relationship (Part III), the ‘Eastern’ realm of inspiration (Part IV), the ‘Northern’ realm of knowledge (Part V) and the ‘Western’ realm of action (Part VI).

The final part reviews the integral development journey and while following the idea of a ‘unity in diversity’, outlines perspectives on an integral university.

For the authors the book and its framework are responding to what they call “profound civilisation crises,” marking a comprehensive shift of individual and collective experiences.

What the book offers is an “understanding-learning-research-education-action-journey” that claims to support the evolution and co-development towards a more integrated paradigm. Thus, it provides a comprehensive overview on significant dimensions for a more integral understanding and enactment of development.

Re- and deconstructing and diagnosing critically disintegrative patterns of past and current developments (and its underlying assumptions) and mono-cultural dominances are revealed.

Integrating design principles brings together all those important realms, rounds, rhythms and realities on local and global levels, from self, organisation, societies, and world, to approach and process development issues and capacities that need to be built into future development work. Accordingly, their differentiated explored, comprehensive fields of developments are ranging from self-development, organisational development, societal development up to, ultimately, integrated practice, allowing various synergistic crossings.

For them whatever the particular calling and challenge a reader might experience or face, developmental issue can be approached integrally. Consequently, their Integral Development framework helps to move starting (a) from a particular reality; (b) via all key realms; (c) adopting a fully integral rhythm; and (d) adopting individual, organisational and societal rounds, and thereby ultimately contributing to new global perspectives.

However, this starting point and logic as well as the implicit status of responsibility tends to underestimate the same of collective actors/agency and institutions/systems (overburdens individuals and local communities).

The responsibility in an Integral Development paradigm lies not any longer primarily with abstract political systems, economics, science and technology. Rather the responsibility for development lies with the people living within a particular context who see a need or follow a desire for development. The process, we are proposing, increases the ‘responsibility’ of each individual development agent. (p. 128)

This specific focus on humans and humanity, appears as a revived humanism. Such humanocentric perspective might be seen as inclining towards a certain ‘anthropocentric’ orientation,

which is in danger of not considering sufficiently that development is not (only) for human flourishing, but involves other living beings, animals, and even anorganic materialities.

As we are living in and coming to grips with the unprecedented challenges of the era of the *Anthropocene*, and for facing the ecological crisis and its underlying anthropocentrism, a anthropo-centred orientation calls to re-situate the ‘anthropos’ and its development in a relational nexus co-constituted not only by its humans (who are in fact ‘humanimals’). Rather development is always already and need to be more mindfully related to ‘other – than-human-beings’, including all those material dynamics of ‘physicalities-cum-culturalities’ involved, and vice versa.

What is needed are integral understandings of the embodied nexus of the *in(ter-)between* of ‘materio~socio~cultural’ phenomena, ‘contextures’ and expressions of corresponding relational practices and its ‘non-/other-+-human’ meanings (Küpers, 2016; Ingold, 2000).

Moving beyond naturalism and constructionism as well as physicalist empiricism and metaphysical idealism, we need to integrate an inter-corporeity of ‘self-other-things’ also in and of defracted organizing with an ethos of engaged letting-go or “Gelassenheit” (Küpers, 2016).

An integral development in this extended sense becomes even more relevant as the potentially catastrophic and irreversible circumstances for human and non-human nature due to non-integral progress and growth-dependencies that become increasingly evident.

Conceptually and methodologically the ordering of contents to categories might be seen as contingent or different. What about overlaps between, for example inspiration – relationship, culture-community or knowledge / action?

With regard to starting point, their plea for progressing inside out, step by step might be complemented by out-side in moves and non-linear unfoldments.

What is dialectically appealing for readers are their guiding questions, clear illustrating tables and figures, providing overview and summary as well as inviting the reader to reflect and process the thought-provoking and action-inviting contents!

Their generic design is different from other representations, (e.g. compared to Wilber as they place action/behaviour or culture and systems differently) and in term of discourse they call for developing even more connectivities to existing integral models.

Critically, some claims are less developed than one might wish and some more reflexive (self-) critical discernments could have been elaborated. What are limitations and problematic aspects of their presented approach? How could development be understood differently? What is or cannot be integrated in their conceptualisation or realisation of integration? Basically, the authors are optimistic that the move beyond the prevailing disintegration and imbalanced approach towards a new integrating and balanced understanding of development is possible. But what about developments that are not progress along the outlined principles? What about liminalities, conflicts, incompatibilities between sub-developmental moves? How can creative tensions between the outlined areas and realms be used for a transformative re-evolution that also moves

via leaps, discontinuous processes? What would a “bounded integrality” (Küpers et al. 2010) mean for development?

How can an non-objectifying ethos of careful and ‘engaged letting-go’ (‘Gelassenheit’) be connected to the envisioned Integral Development that is realizing the “Transformative Potential of Individuals, Organizations and Societies?”

Which habitual, representational and appropriating orientations as well as corresponding projection and totalizing closures of enframing and actions need to be abandoned, for accomplishing the aspired integral development?

What role may a receptive waiting and listening, thus more an ‘active non-doing’ in relation to things and what ‘matters’ play, rather than a willing and controlling business, including if this claims to be an integral one?

How can modes of poetic relations, intermediated via a presencing, atmospheric sensitivity and proto-meditative tuning and possibilities for the be(com)ing of an ‘Othering’ be cultivated?

One area or link for future research on integral development may be practical wisdom. How can an integral development be qualified as a wise one? What role might a critical poetic *phronêsis* an embodied, wise and artful practice (Küpers, 2013) mean for future integral developments?

Altogether, Alexander Schieffer and Ronnie Lessem have provided a richly insightful and highly readable look at how an integral development can be not only per- and conceived, but also put into practice.

Overall, this book is in a way a culmination of what the authors have done and an aspirational, programmatic and practical agenda what needs to be done to better conceptualize and enact more integral forms of development.

In this way and in the proper spirit of ‘Gelassenheit’ they contribute to the r-evolutionary unfoldment of integral thinking and acting, for which I hoped that it will find a wide appeal, and resonant readership.

Readers’, including me, are certainly looking forward to the next iterations and descriptions of their project, whose value, as consists in integrating contents, program and style his book calls for and itself exemplifies.

Their work is offering real hope for a proactive orientation and constructive response to the enormous and unprecedented challenges of our age and for a more integral future to come.

More information about the book, the prologue, and a chapter can be found here:  
<http://www.ashgate.com/isbn/9781409423539>

More information about the authors and their initiative are here:

<http://www.trans-4-m.com/>

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