



Exploring the Homo Semioticus Paradigm for Sense-making in the Human Niche

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The 'homo semioticus paradigm' offers new insights on how 'matters of concerns' arise when communicating geosciences [1]. This paradigm has been formulated (within the 'Semiotic Cultural Psychological Theory', SCPT) to describe 'affective sense-making of people'. Functioning at the group level, 'affective sense-making' causes people perceiving evidence, insights or concepts in accordance with (their) 'symbolic universes' (worldviews) [2]. Regarding geosciences, the 'homo semioticus paradigm' offers a new lens to explore how people relate to its concepts.

This contribution introduces the homo semioticus paradigm, discusses its applicability given the ecological concept of 'human niche', and applies its analytical key-feature ('symbolic universes') to how people may perceive the normative framework of geoethics [3] to act in their niche.

SCPT has successfully revealed structures of the perception of the cultural-political features of European societies by describing people's experiences, their perceptions, predispositions, reactions and acts depending on (their mode of) 'affective sense-making'. People are found to identify with and apply various 'symbolic universes', such as 'ordered universe', 'interpersonal bound', 'caring society', 'niche of belongingness', and 'others' world'. It seems possible, so the hypothesis of this essay, to structure analogously how a 'homo semioticus' perceives its place within the 'human niche'.

The metaphorical term 'human niche' or the corresponding technical notion 'anthropogenic biome' labels systems of intersecting natural processes, technological schemes and human practices. An anthropogenic biome consists of networked complex-adaptive societal-ecological systems, which exhibit societal and environmental dynamics that are non-separable. Likewise, human sense-making is an intrinsic part of these systems [4]. Complex-adaptive socio-ecological systems are challenging people's capabilities to gain insights and, subsequently to act responsibly. In such circumstances, people deploy (their) worldviews ('symbolic universes') as a device to aggregate evidence, insights, concepts and norms in a conveniently biased manner.

The normative call of geoethics (addressing scientists and citizens), namely to reflect "on the values which underpin appropriate behaviours and practices, wherever human activities interact with the Earth system" will trigger different response, depending on the 'symbolic universe' that shapes the respondent's way of feeling and thinking. Likewise, people will perceive a given feature of the 'human niche' depending on their 'symbolic universes'. Hence, people's individual and collective value-laden decision making (including policy-making) will bias evidence, insights, concepts and norm as perceived through the lens of their 'symbolic universe'.

Summarising, this contribution sketches an approach to study, through the 'homo semioticus paradigm', the sense-making feedback-loop in complex-adaptive socio-ecological systems; a loop that the normative call of geoethical thinking aims to addresses.

[1] Stewart, I. S., & Lewis, D. (2017). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.earscirev.2017.09.003>

[2] Salvatore, S., et al. (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354067X18779056>

[3] Di Capua et al. (2017). <https://doi.org/10.4401/ag-7553>

[4] Bohle, M. (forthcoming). Homo Semioticus Migrating out of Area? In: S. Salvatore et al. (eds.), What future for Europe? Symbolic Universes in the time of (post)crisis, Springer