Institutions, nations, communications and distributed organisation (the Westphalian Dilemma)

Professor Raul Espejo

World Organisation of Systems and Cybernetics

And

Syncho Research

The Westphalian
Treaty, 1648

A discussion of global and local responsibilities and issues

- COVID-19 has highlighted a pandemic which affects the whole of humanity at the same time that affects individuals, families, communities and nation-states, making more likely the emergence of nationalisms and populisms.

- The same issue –COVID 19- requires responses at multiple levels; from the individuals dealing at a personal level with the viral infection, to families responding to quarantines, to localities experiencing spikes of contamination, to communities confronting economic restrictions.

- At the most global level an important response to the pandemic has been with vaccines. Unfortunately this response has been uneven for people throughout the world. Experts have argued that a distributed response would have reduced the risk for new variations, such as Omicron. Local-global relations allow scientist to appreciate the complexity experienced by billions of people and the need for responses at multiple structural levels. I discuss this issue in this presentation.

Gordon Brown: mismatches between global and local problems

Gordon Brown in his recent book "Seven ways to change the world"2021) has recognized :

"…there is a mismatch between the global nature of the problems we face and our capacity- or willingness- to resolve them as a global community. Instead, we continue to work within a predominantly national framework." and adds "…*why, in the face of such glaring need, national governments seemed so ineffective and international institutions seemed so powerless to act*"

Brown's statement didn't look like a paradox, as it wasn't logically self-contradictory, but it made apparent operational challenges; local independent nation-states vs autonomous states operating in a global context.

Managing the proliferating complexity between levels

Organisations need structures capable of adapting to the environmental challenges. They need to correct variety imbalances between them and the environmental challenges of the pandemic. These are corrections to reduce the magnitude of the threats and to amplify the quality of the responses, accepting that resources are limited. This requires effective organisation of multiple recursive structures, with distributed adaptation and cohesion at multiple levels of complexity. They need a recursive structure.

What is the Westphalian dilemma?

I argue that the Westphalian dilemma is fundamentally the outcome of failure in this recursive structure. After Westphalia we have been talking of independent nation-states, more focused on their own problems rather than on issues that require autonomous nation-states operating in a cohesive global context. A consequence of independence vs. autonomy, as is discussed in this contribution, is making less likely to respond to global challenges with adequate political, social and economic responses at all structural levels. This reflection applies to COVID 19 as much as to other issues such as climate change.

Visualising global and local: Unfolding of complexity (Beer, 1979)

Environment

Primary Activity

Sub-Primary Activty
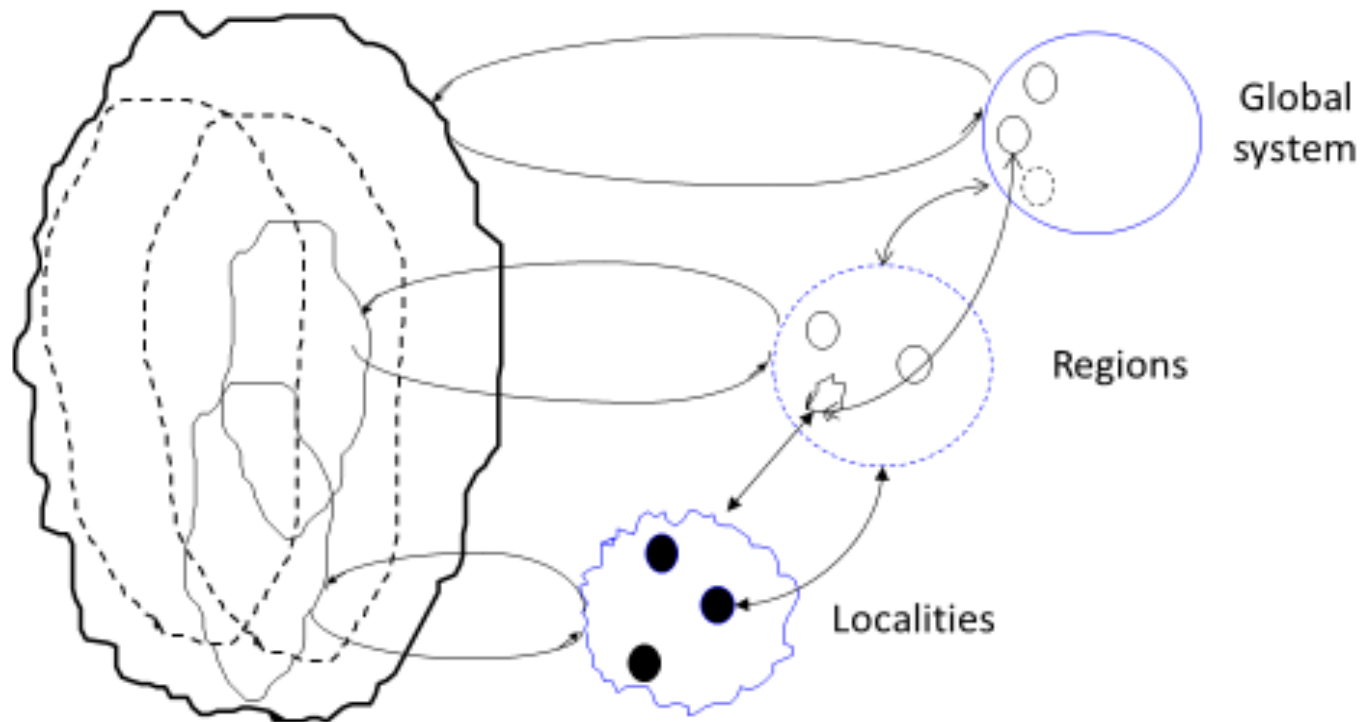
Sub-Sub-Primary Activity

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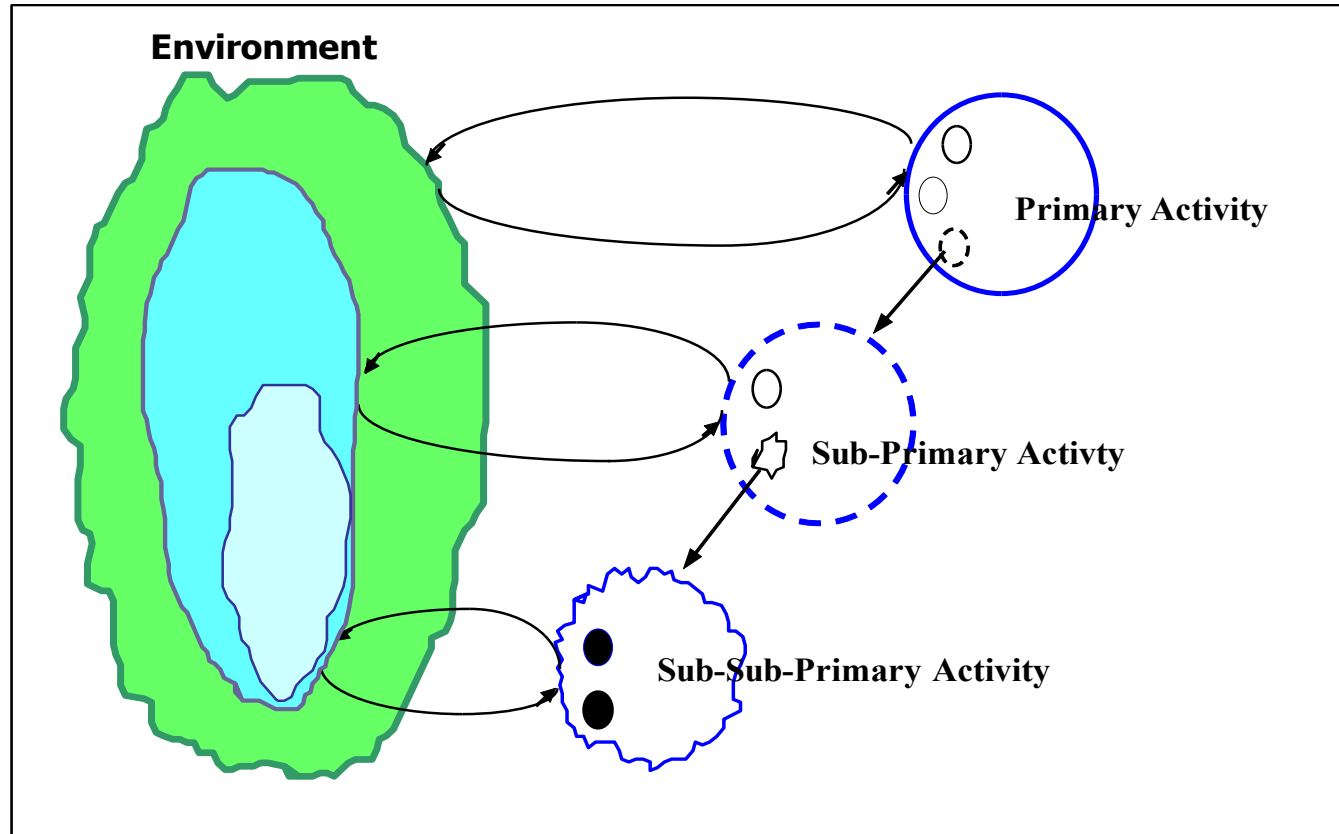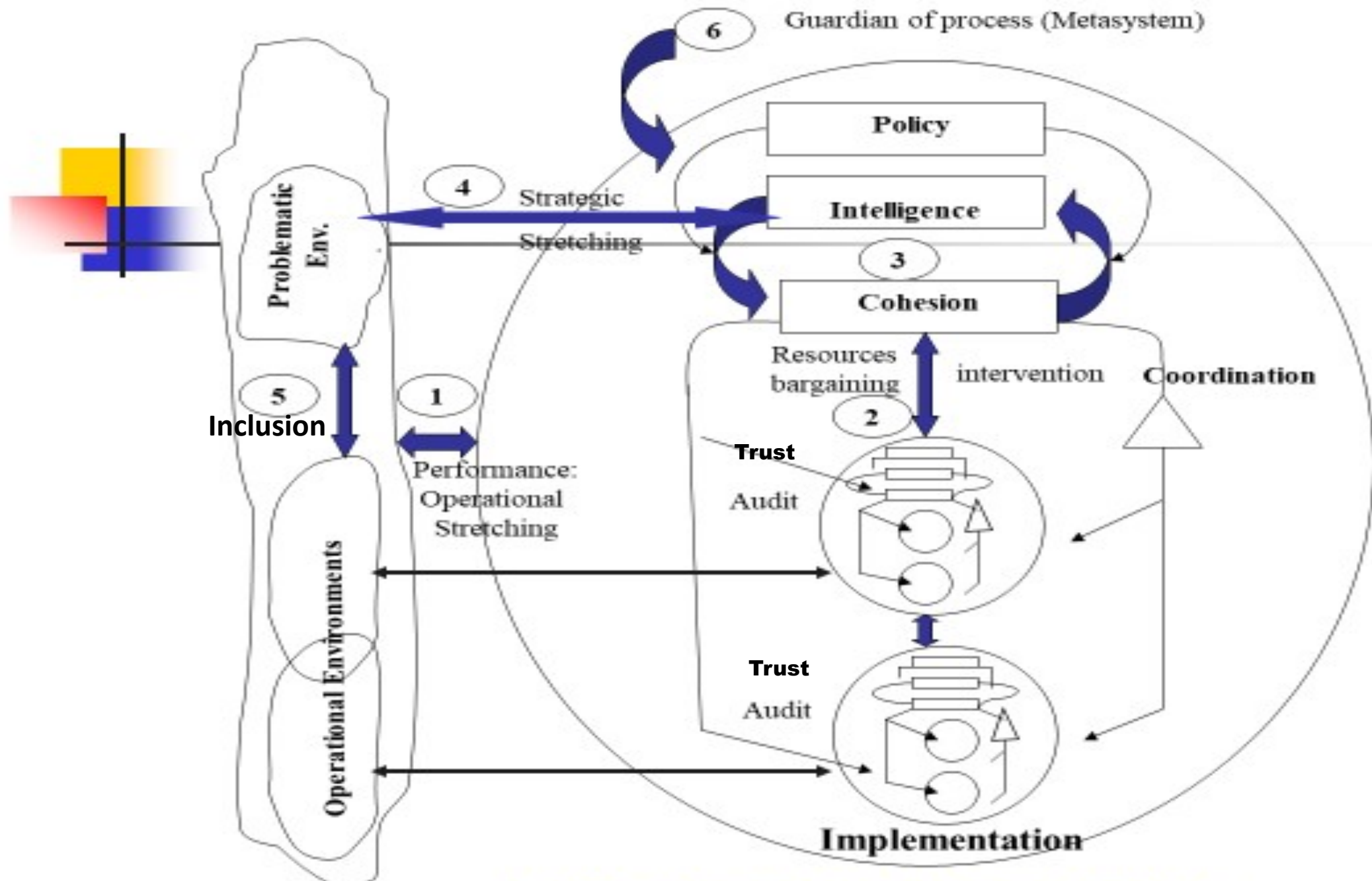
VSM: a heuristic for systemicity

Operational Closure in Meaning Creation Processes: self-reference

In practice recursion is very untidy and doesn't follow the above embedding structure.
We need to discuss this untidiness:

E.g. Energy System, Energy production, Energy technology development …

Key questions about nation-states and institutions

- Are we proposing nation-states to become viable organisational systems?

- Do we expect institutions, such as the United Nations or the International Energy Agency (IEA), to develop the structure of viable systems?

- Do we expect that key policy issues, such as sustainable energy, develop viability in structural terms?

These are very different questions. Often the Westphalian nations are highly normed, with structures strongly influenced by constraining relationships. How flexible are likely to be these structures? To what extent are recursive structures and behaviours possible within nation states, let alone beyond them?

Hierachical Strategy
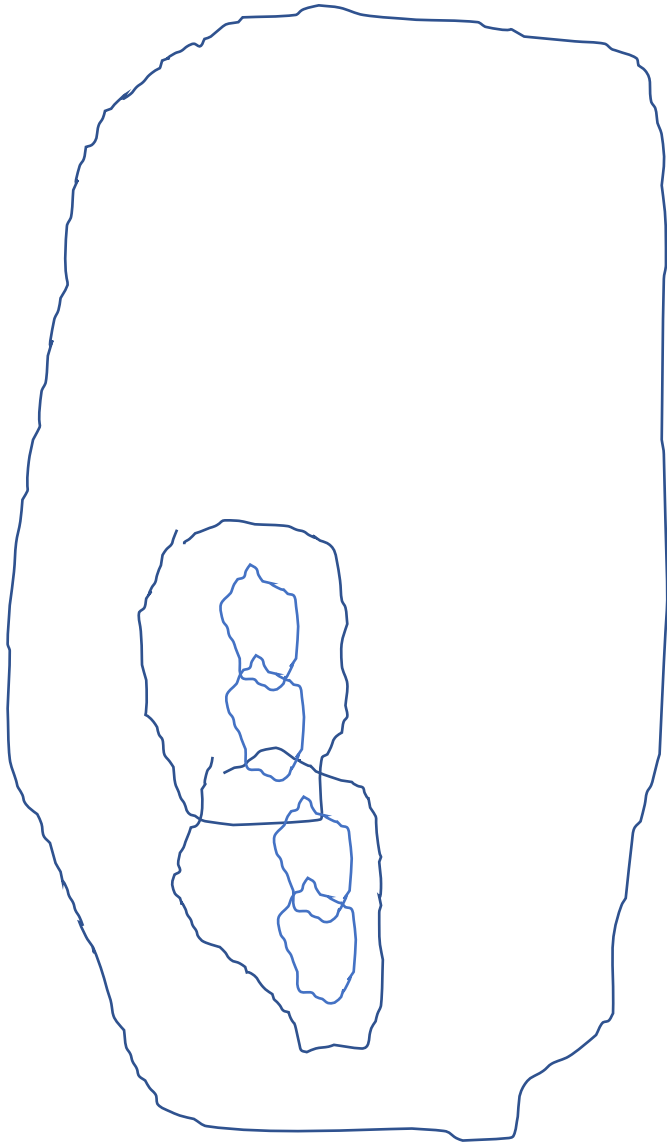
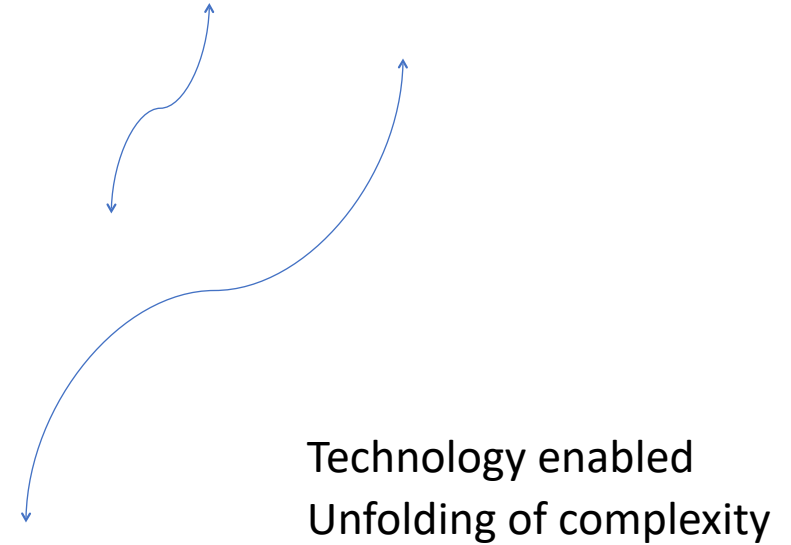**Recursive Strategy**

Hierachical strategy to
manage complexity:
embedded units lack
operational
closure

Recursive strategy to
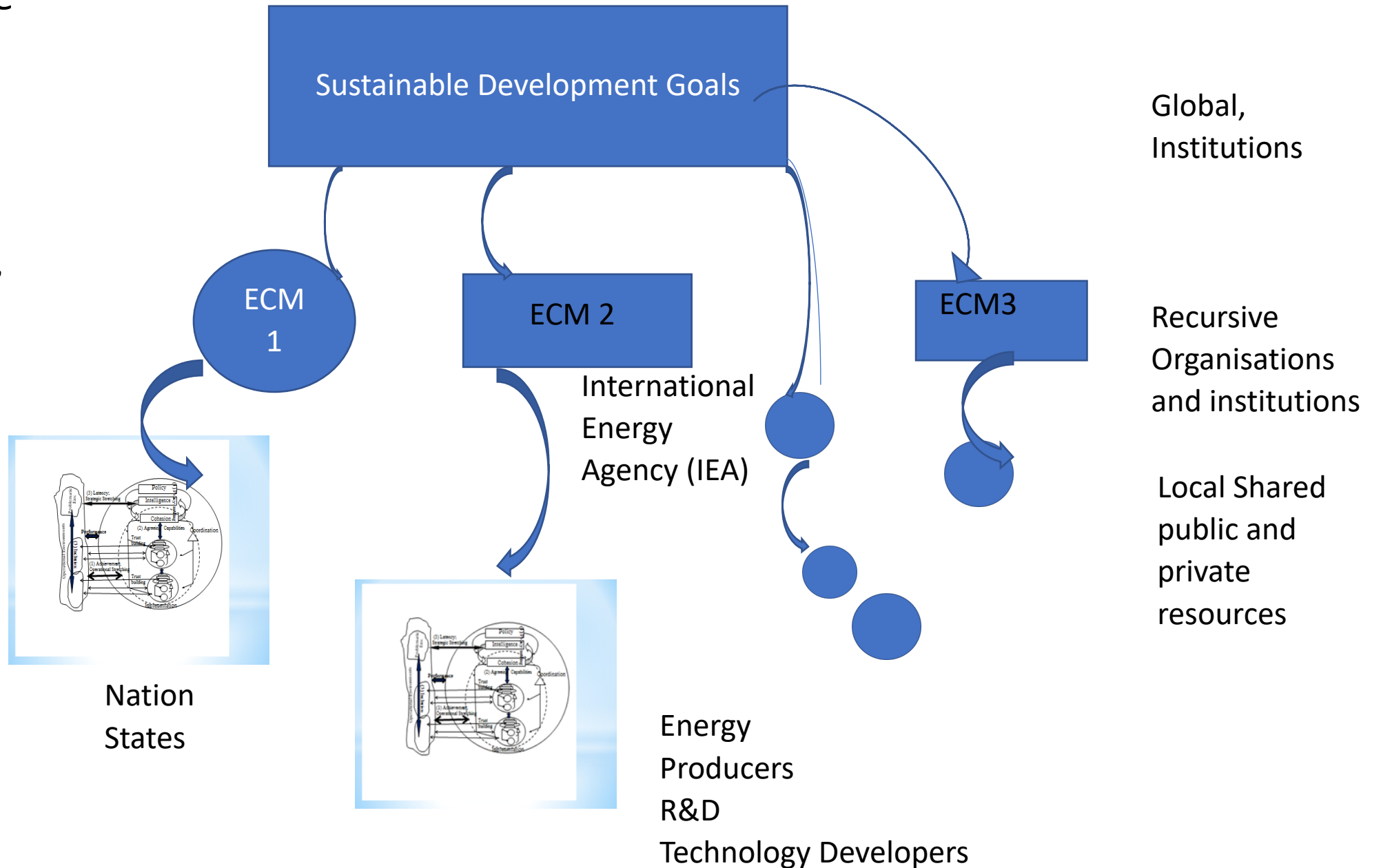manage complexity:
  units with
  operational
  closure

Technology enabled
Unfolding of complexity

Operationally Closed Systems Develop
Eigenbehaviours

Viplan Methodology, Sustainable Goals and Social Responsibility

Observing

Naming

social issues, Social responsibility, participation

Names for constructs in focus; epistemological and ontological constructs of public-private resources

Cybernetic (inner) loop: improving systems for Society

Improving the cybernetics of social Constructs; *inclusive participation and conversations*

Ontological social constructs; organisational systems as meta subjects. Values and principles

reflexivity

Interactions, self-organisation correcting variety imbalances

learning (outer) loop: Developing social systems

Systems as epistemological constructs; modelling subject-object and subject-subject issues;

Implementing

Designing

To manage the complexity of policy issues (e.g. SDGs), through Nation-States, Institutions, Enterprises, I'm proposing Enterprise Complexity Models as extensions of the VSM.

Sustainable Development Goals

Global, Institutions

ECM 1

ECM 2

ECM3

International Energy Agency (IEA)

Recursive Organisations and institutions

Local Shared public and private resources

Nation States

Energy Producers R&D Technology Developers

For better policies

Thank you